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HISTORY OF PENNY POSTAGE.



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HISTORY OF
PENNY POSTAGE.

With a Prefatory Memoir.

BY

SIR ROWLAND HILL, K.C.B., D.C.L. (OXON), F.R.S., F.R.A.S., ETC.

VOLUME I.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES & SONS, STAMFORD STREET
AND CHARING CROSS.

1871.

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PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS,
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ADVERTISEMENT.

I most earnestly request that every one into whose hands this narrative may fall will pay the strictest attention to the notification which heads the title-page, and regard the contents as confidential. For this injunction he will find sufficient reason in the closing paragraph of the Preface.

ROWLAND HILL.

P R E F A C E.

THE following narrative was originally drawn up at much greater length, and in its present shape is the result of a double abridgment, first in manuscript and afterwards in print. This proceeding was according to a preconceived plan; my wish being to leave to my relatives a more detailed history than was likely to be acceptable to the public, and at the same time to supply ample means for dealing with any question that might arise as to accuracy of statement.

Perhaps it may be thought that abridgment might have been advantageously carried yet further; but, on the one hand, I hope there is at present no more superfluous matter than can be readily skipt; and, on the other, I naturally desired that the public should have so much of detail as would distinctly set forth the authorship, execution, and administration of the chief postal reforms effected during the last thirty years.

My story is told in the first person, but it is only in a limited sense that it is autobiographic. For reasons that will be easily gathered from the

narrative, I had to devolve upon another the task of immediate composition, and I deemed it fortunate that one upon whose pen I had much relied from the first had leisure for the work. This, I may remark, is much more vicarious in the narrative presented to the public than in the original, where events are to a great extent described in letters or in extracts from my journal. Of course the whole has undergone my careful revision, a duty in which I have been by no means unaided ; but, after every correction, I cannot feel sure that sense has not sometimes suffered in paraphrase ; and if it appear hereafter that on some minor points expression conveys or suggests erroneous meaning, I must ask the reader to believe that such deviation is not only contrary to my intention and sincere desire, but has occurred in spite of our earnest efforts.

If the reader find somewhat too much of self-assertion, if he think I have too often quoted what is complimentary to myself, I ask him to consider how much I have suffered from detraction and injustice ; how my conclusions were ridiculed, my success denied, and how, when success was incontestable, the origination of my plan was claimed by others. Let him see me dismissed from office, without recompense, by a man of Sir Robert Peel's high character, and consider the presumption naturally arising from an act so unusual ; let him observe how long and pertinaciously the progress of postal reform was troubled and thwarted, and how loudly and confidently I was charged with proceedings for which I of all men was farthest from being responsible. He will readily be

aware that claims and accusations may revive when I am no more ; and will perhaps pardon me if, with all the reserve adverted to above, I am still led by precaution into what he may regard as prolixity.

One point more. If it be asked why I do not yet publish this history, so as to enable me to meet in my own person any controversy to which it may give rise, I answer first, that by the time of its completion, my vigour, both of body and mind, had become so impaired, as to put such direct defence, should it be needed, altogether beyond my power ; and secondly, that I hope and trust the delay of a few years may enable my executors, while retaining all statements essential to the completeness of the narrative, so to place it before the public as to avoid wounding the feelings of any one.

February, 1871.

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HISTORY OF PENNY POSTAGE.

PREFATORY MEMOIR, 1795 TO 1836.

IF the work of my life holds interest in the public mind, perhaps some curiosity may exist as to that train of events by which, as I believe, I was unconsciously fitted for its execution. This therefore I propose to describe, premising, however, on the one hand, that the narrative must not be taken as a full memoir of my life, much being omitted that would be required to make such treatise complete, and, on the other, that some passages in the subsequent history are rather biographical than historical.

At the time of my birth (which occurred in the year 1795) my parents were in very straitened circumstances; and this state of things, with but slow and unsteady improvement, continued through the whole of my childhood and boyhood, extending even into the period of my youth. This fact involves so many consequences, that I cannot but consider it as constituting an important, perhaps essential part of my training. Its consequences were of course of a very mixed character, on the one hand grievously stinting my education, and depriving me of many advantages accessible and even familiar to the more affluent, but, on the other, driving me to efforts for which, in easier circumstances, I might have lacked motive.

The most immediate consequence was that, in common with my brothers, I was called upon, at a very early age, to perform many offices, which in richer families are discharged exclusively by servants; to go on errands, to help in cleaning, arranging, and even repairing, and in short to do any sort of work that lay within my power. By this means I gradually acquired, as will hereafter better appear, a feeling of responsibility, and habits of business, despatch, punctuality, and independence, which have proved invaluable to me through life.

Another circumstance of great importance was the respective characters of my parents; my mother was a woman of shrewd sense, great courage,* and firmness, and eminently practical; my father, a man so bold in speculative inquiry, as frequently to lead us into what we now regard as error, but, on the other hand, often seeing and fearlessly proclaiming truths which, though now generally regarded as almost truisms, were then looked on by most people as mere crotchets, and too often brought on him unmerited ridicule and obloquy. Thus, from my earliest recollection, he denounced the slave trade, and slavery itself, called for the removal of Roman Catholic disabilities, as also for a rectification and reasonable extension of parliamentary suffrage, shuddered at the frequency of capital punishment, maintained the justice and propriety of allowing counsel to address the jury for the defence in trials for felony, and even of receiving the evidence of parties; was a thorough free-trader,

* Many instances fell under my own observation, but the one I mention was of earlier date. Happening to be present when, in the midst of a violent thunderstorm, an imperious mistress ordered her terrified maid-servant to go and take down the clothes that were hanging out to dry, my mother at once volunteered for the service, and performed it in full, though not without imminent risk of her life; for before she could regain the house, a tree from which she had detached one of the lines was struck by the lightning.

condemned all laws against usury, laughed at all social objections to the employment of machinery,* strongly condemned the judge-made law which involved in partnership all persons who were paid for the use of capital by a share in profits, and foresaw the benefits to be derived from a general system of limited liability.

Lastly, he was earnestly in favour of the representation of minorities, and about fifty years ago drew up a plan for effecting this, which was in substance the same as that lately promulgated, and indeed independently devised, by Mr. Hare: of this I shall have occasion to say more hereafter. As respects the French Revolution, the great touchstone of opinion at the time, he took the middle view commonly held now, but then so rare as almost to isolate a man from all parties. He had hailed the meeting of the States-General and the taking of the Bastille as the dawn of French liberty, but had been revolted by the violence that followed, shocked at the execution of the king and queen, and was appalled by the atrocities of the reign of terror, yet disposed to attribute all, less to innate ferocity in the French character, than to the famine under which France was then suffering, and the attempt of the continental powers to control her political action. He condemned our joining the coalition against her, and never could forgive Pitt his share in that proceeding. On the other hand, he justified the war of 1803, had his pupils, for he had then become a schoolmaster, armed and drilled in the great volun-

* The strength of prejudice at the time is well exemplified by the following epigram, written in all earnestness and sincerity by one of my father's intimate friends:

And what did Watt accomplish for mankind?
What was the produce of his powerful mind?
He found machinery a deadly curse;
And what did Watt? He left it ten times worse.

teer period that followed (thereby so displeasing two of his best friends as to cause them to withdraw their sons from his school), and always felt towards Bonaparte as near an approach to hatred as his principles would allow.

I may here observe that in our family, which eventually comprised six sons and two daughters, conversation at meals and other times, when not engrossed, as was too frequently the case, with matters of business, commonly turned on scientific discovery or social improvement, more frequently the latter; and doubtless some of my father's views were more or less modified by such discussions, especially I believe by what fell from my eldest brother, Matthew Davenport. We recognised three great eras in modern improvement, viz., the invention of gunpowder, of printing, and of the steam-engine, and were fond of tracing other improvements to these; but in everything which we looked upon as tending to increase general happiness we all took much interest; while my father, almost to the day of his death, welcomed each successive advancement with positive delight. I must in fairness add, that sharing all such of my father's views as are mentioned above, and holding them as not merely sound but unquestionable, we were too often, I fear, impatient of contradiction, and intolerant of other opinions. My father's habit of bold speculation (of course I use the term in its moral sense) he communicated in greater or less degree to all his children; and though in each of us it has been chastened by time and experience, yet it must be looked back to as the probable source of a certain originality, which in greater or less degree has shown itself in all.

I may here mention that my father had a decided turn for mechanics; and, in the straitened circum-

stances of the family, was in the habit of making those repairs which otherwise would have been relegated to the carpenter or locksmith. When but nine years old he fortunately heard James Ferguson lecture on this subject, as also on astronomy and electricity; and to each of the three, but more particularly the first two, he subsequently gave much time and attention. Even eighty years afterwards he was fond of reverting to lectures which had so early impressed his mind.* One of my own earliest propensities was in the same direction; and I have been told, that while yet under three years of age, having once been taken to see a water-wheel in motion, I used frequently to call for a repetition of this pleasure; crying, childlike, when it could not be granted. I may add that to this day, perhaps from old associations, I am always ready to go some distance out of my way for the same enjoyment. At the early age of five I had a small water-wheel of my own construction, rude enough doubtless, but so far complete as to work with tolerable briskness, in an occasional rivulet near my father's house; in which fortunately there was at one point a sufficient fall. A year afterwards I joined an elder brother of similar tastes in constructing a small model forge, whose wheel was turned by water from the pump spout. This brother, by name Edwin, who had attained the mature age of eight, I looked upon as a skilled traveller, he having visited with his eyes wide open certain ironworks, distant about seventeen miles. Inspired by what he had seen, and emboldened by the success of our previous experiment, we proceeded to erect a forge of more regular construction, the walls being of brick, duly cemented with mortar, and the water-wheel, which I think was about two feet and a half in diameter,

* For a brief memoir of my father, see Appendix to Vol. II.

pretty fairly shaped. The axle was the stem of a cherry-tree, which of course we had some trouble in adapting to its purpose. When all was thus far complete, we attempted to connect our machinery by means of a crank with the handle of the pump, expecting that if we once gave it a start the water would turn the wheel, while this would not only work the forge, but also maintain, by its operation on the pump, the stream necessary to its own movement. In short, we looked for a perpetual motion, and were greatly disappointed to find motion at an end as soon as our own hands were withdrawn from the pump. When we mentioned our perplexity to my father, after informing us that our attempt was hopeless, and giving us such explanation as we could understand, he consoled us under our discomfiture by telling us that many persons, much older and wiser than ourselves, had expended time, labour and money in the same fruitless quest.

I must state here that our mechanical proceedings were much facilitated by three circumstances : first, the command of a room to be used as a workshop ; secondly, an abundant supply of materials ; and thirdly, access to tools. The materials consisted chiefly of the remains of three looms, formerly employed by my grandfather in a manufacturing process, which, after continuing some time with success, was brought to a sudden close when Spain, which was his sole customer (his product being ponchos), reluctantly joined France in the war of the revolution. The tools were the identical implements which my father had himself used in his boyhood ; and our nails, screws, &c., were deposited in a small cubical chest of twelve drawers, of very simple but tolerably neat workmanship, which he had made, as he told us, at the age of twelve.

The command of a room may appear surprising

where means were so scanty, and the circumstance which gave it is not a little curious. The house we then inhabited was held at so low a rent, in proportion to its size and convenience, that my father, as he often afterwards told us, had great misgiving as to the tenement; and, previously to taking the house, examined carefully, expecting to find some serious nuisance on or near the premises; his doubts being strengthened by the fact that the house had long stood empty. It was not until we were in complete occupation that the secret came out. "The house was haunted," and no moderation of rent or amount of convenience had sufficed to allure any one into tenancy. I need not say that, had this fact been as openly declared to my father as it was carefully concealed from him, he would have taken the house without hesitation. It was indeed haunted by rats and mice, who had taken advantage of the vacancy, but supernatural visitants were awaited in vain.

Thus far, and indeed up to the end of my seventh year, hardly an attempt was made to give me direct instruction. Not only I could not read, but I scarcely knew my letters; and I had been left at almost entire liberty. My elder brothers attended an humble school in the neighbouring town of Wolverhampton, but partly because of my more tender age, and partly because my health thus far had been feeble, I remained at home. At the same time I was, as already shown, receiving a kind of education, which, however informal and desultory, was of no small value. I may add that, as it was important to my health that I should lie down during a portion of each day, my mother, to amuse me and keep me quiet, used to hang a number of little articles on a line stretched across me as I lay; and thus, perhaps unintentionally, gave me lessons on objects years before the term was heard of. I may add that, by way of variety, I passed much

of this recumbency in the process of counting ; assisting myself by a kind of topical memory ; my practice being to count a certain number, generally a hundred, with my eye fixed on one definite place as a corner of the ceiling, a panel of the door, or a pane in the window ; and afterwards by counting up the points so selected, to ascertain the total of the enumeration. Nearly all my education, however, had thus far been informal ; but now the scene was to change. My father had a kind and valued friend, who kept at Birmingham a school of somewhat higher pretensions than that attended by my brothers. Nevertheless, concurrently with his work as a schoolmaster, he had carried on some small manufacturing processes ; and, as his trade was thriving, and made increasing demands on his time, he wished to get his school off his hands ; and my father, who had never found trade congenial to his taste, or very profitable to his pocket, became his successor, his positive acquirements being certainly far in advance of those of his friend, and indeed very far beyond the requirements of the post he was about to occupy.* To this change, moreover, he was urged, nay importuned, by my mother, who not only grieved to see her husband's powers and acquirements, of which she naturally thought very highly, unexercised and unknown, but also longed, with a deep desire, to procure for her children the best education that could be brought within their reach.

On our removal to Birmingham I was of course enrolled in the school ; which, however, was removed from the town to an airy spot in the suburbs, where it remained for sixteen years. My direct education now therefore began, though its course was much

* He was some few years later much engaged in preparing young men in mathematics for the university ; amongst his pupils was the present master of Caius College, Cambridge, Dr. Guest.

interrupted by frequent illness, and the continued necessity, notwithstanding some addition to servant power, for my employment, together with that of my brothers, in little domestic duties.

Amidst all, however, my brother Edwin and I still managed to have time for our mechanical pursuits; and fortunately we found at our new home a more commodious workshop, fitted with benches, a vice, and even comprising a blacksmith's forge. Here we spent much of our spare time, and most of our spare cash; which latter, however, was but very scanty.

At the age of eleven my hours for learning were further restricted by my being called upon to teach; for, young and ignorant as I was, I had inferiors both in age and knowledge; some of my father's pupils not being more than six or seven years old. A year later, my brother Edwin having left the school to engage in mechanical pursuits, I had to take a more important part, of course to the further diminution of my own lessons.

About this time (it was in the year 1807) my father, with a view to some little augmentation of income, gave a series of lectures, viz., three on electricity, two on mechanics, two on astronomy, two on pneumatics, and one on the gases. The experiments were performed by one of my maternal uncles, who had indeed constructed most of the apparatus with his own hands. These lectures, to which I paid a fixed attention, gave me a new impulse. I resolved to make an electrical machine for myself, and speedily went to work. The cylinder (plate-glass machines were yet unknown) I got blown at a glass-house in the town; paying for it the sum of sixteen shillings. Of course, to a child, there was much difficulty at almost every step, but my hardest task was to make a pattern for the caps. My first attempt was sufficiently primitive, viz., to cut one out from a large turnip.

Not succeeding in this, I resorted to casting. Lead was the metal I naturally chose, as most easily melted; and having, after many attempts, at length succeeded in bringing my sand into due shape, I emptied my ladle into the mould and brought out my pattern cap; which, when duly smoothened in the lathe of a friendly workman in the neighbourhood, I bore, with no small pride and satisfaction, to the founder's that it might be cast in brass. One serious difficulty in construction I avoided by carrying the axle, which was a strong iron rod, right through the cylinder instead of attempting to break it off, as usual, just within the caps. The prime conductor, too, I did not attempt to make hollow, but satisfied myself with bringing a piece of wood into the proper cylindrical shape, and then covering it over, first with paper, and afterwards with tinfoil.

While the work was in progress I was attacked with illness, and for a time was confined to the house. It was during this period that the new caps, in all their first brightness, arrived from the brass-founder's; and as soon as I was a little better I was of course eager to attach them to the cylinder; but the workshop being too cold for an invalid, my patience would have been sorely tried had not my indulgent mother made provision for me in the parlour, by substituting for the hearthrug an old carpet folded in several doubles, so as to prevent the droppings from my ladle from injuring the somewhat better carpet on the floor; and here, the cement being melted over a good fire, the cylinder was duly prepared for mounting.

My simple apparatus was completed in about a year and a half. I set it to work with no small trepidation, having heard much about the uncertainty of electrical action, and fearing lest my limited means and powers might have left some fatal defect. So

great was my uncertainty, that even after giving the machine three or four turns, I still hesitated to apply the decisive test, and great indeed were my pride and joy when my knuckle drew from the conductor its first spark. Down stairs I rushed in quest of sympathy, nor could I be satisfied until my father and many others had witnessed the performance with admiring eyes. A few years afterwards I added some improvements, substituting for the deal frame one of mahogany, procuring a hollow conductor from the tinman's, made of course according to my own directions, and giving also greater neatness and efficiency to the subordinate parts of the machine and its various adjuncts; and I may add the apparatus, though in a somewhat imperfect state, is still extant. Meanwhile, however, a friend of my father's, the late Mr. Michael Beasley, a schoolmaster of Stourbridge, who through life showed great affection for me, and to whom I owe much in various ways, having seen the machine in its first simple state, engaged me to make a duplicate for himself, though on a smaller scale. This I accomplished in about six months; and while my outlay amounted to two pounds I received in payment, for materials and workmanship, the sum of three guineas, which I considered a handsome remuneration; though I have now no doubt that my kind friend would have given me yet more had his means been less restricted.

About the time that I made my first machine, my father, still seeking addition to his small income, set up a ruling machine, purposing not only to rule the copybooks to be used in the school, but also to execute such orders as might be received from without. The pens for this machine were at first constructed by my uncle before mentioned. Such pens were made then, as I suppose they are still, of latten brass; and, of

course, to form them according to the required patterns demanded some little skill. However, either at my uncle's suggestion or at my own desire, I hastened to make myself master of the art, and soon became sole penmaker to the house.

Not content with ruling the paper, we proceeded to manufacture the copybooks, at first with some help from a bookbinder, but afterwards without any extraneous assistance. Here, too, as in the ruling process, we were open to orders from without. The paper-shavings which I cut off with the *plough* from the edges of the books were accorded to me as a perquisite, and made an acceptable addition to my scanty funds. Taking advantage of the opportunity thus given, and of the implements procured for the work, I proceeded to acquire, in its simpler forms, the art of bookbinding; an art which I find I have not yet quite lost; having lately, in my seventy-first year, made up a scrap-book, in what is called half-binding, for the use of my grandchildren. Thus prepared, and still bent on increasing my very minute revenue, I established a small circulating library, open to my father's pupils; and though I believe my money gain was not large, my profits enabled me at least to add considerably to my little stock of books.

I have mentioned that I became in some measure a teacher at the early age of eleven. By the time I completed my fifteenth year my pupilage was at an end; and whatever I learned afterwards was by voluntary study, aided, however, in greater or less degree, by my father and my eldest brother. Considering all my occupations, the time for this was but very moderate; but, strange to say, I had, at this early period, no misgivings as to my fitness for the post of teacher; and whenever applied to by my pupils, I contrived to give the required information. When I was seventeen years old, Mr.

Beasley received, as pupil, a young midshipman, who came to learn navigation. For whatever reason, he applied to me to give the required instruction, and, though I had never yet opened a book on navigation in my life, I unhesitatingly undertook the task. Probably, in preparing my lessons, I had some assistance from my father; but, one way or other, I discharged the duty to the satisfaction, I believe, of all concerned, teaching my pupil not merely what might be learned from books, but also the practical art of navigation, so far as this could be done on land, so that he became able, by actual observation, to find latitude, longitude, and local time, the second being a matter of some difficulty. This, however, was a serious addition to my work, Mr. Beasley's school being twelve miles distant, and my weekly journey thither and back being always performed on foot, with a Hadley's quadrant to carry each time to and fro, though, even when so encumbered, I was in those days a very brisk walker. I must add that, at the time when this extra labour came upon me, my ordinary hours in school were nine and a half per diem; in addition to which I, in common with my father and my eldest brother, Matthew, had many lessons to give elsewhere. Of course I found some additional time for study in the holidays, but even then I had much else to do, having taken upon myself, with some assistance from my younger brothers, to do a large portion of the whitewashing and much of the painting required in the house from time to time. I was very zealous, however, in the pursuit of knowledge, especially when intercourse with better educated youths had made me sensible of my own deficiencies. Science, rather than literature, was the object of my affections, for though at one time I turned to languages, my success there was but little encouraging, while, on the other hand, I found

geometry present such facilities, that in the course of a single vacation (and our vacations were but short ones) I succeeded, by a strained effort however, in extending my knowledge from an imperfect acquaintance with the first book of Euclid (Simpson's) to a mastery of the whole work.

Nearly two years before my lesson-giving in navigation, viz., in the year 1811, my brother Arthur, who had a dramatic turn, and who like myself was always willing to seek means to add to his allowance of pocket-money, formed a project for theatrical performances, to which the boys and perhaps some few others might be admitted on payment. Finding all dramas to which he had access far too long and difficult for his purpose, he boldly turned author, and parts were learned and scenes practised, though with considerable increase to inevitable difficulties, from the circumstance that the drama grew as the work proceeded, new thoughts striking the young dramatist, and new scenes being added for their development. He and his partners had neither scenes nor properties, not even a proscenium or curtain; neither had they any notion of the outlay that would be required; but they were in downright earnest, and had entered into a strict covenant to appropriate all their pocket-money, whencesoever derived, or whatever its amount, to their great object; and though, as might be expected, several of the associates eventually shrunk from a partnership where the terms were so stringent, yet a small band held together firmly till the end was attained.

For aid and advice they applied to me, though still but fifteen, I being at least two years older than the eldest amongst them. The more, however, I told them about the cost and other difficulties, the more anxious they grew as to the success of their enterprise, until at length, by their joint entreaty, I was

prevailed on to assume the management, undertaking myself to paint the scenes, construct the machinery, and direct the whole course of action. I declined to become a performer, having no turn that way, but I demanded absolute power of direction, which was readily conceded, my brother telling me that without me all would come to nothing. Here was a considerable addition to my labours, and how I found time for it I might now be puzzled to say, but the work went forward. Our scenes were painted on brown paper, the sheets being glued together; and our side-scenes being painted on both sides, revolved, in changing, on a pivot in the middle; so that of these we had, at first, but a single change. Difficulties were considerably augmented by the fact that our theatre was the schoolroom, and that our scenery, &c., could only be put up in leisure hours, having always to be removed when lesson-time returned. This compelled us to work early as well as late, and we generally rose an hour before the others. Our chief strain, however, being to raise the necessary funds for our ever-augmenting expenses, we resorted to various expedients for this purpose; amongst others, the manufacture and sale to the boys of balls formed of yarn, taken from the loom mentioned before, and quilted with the same material. We also fabricated fire-balloons, one of large size and regular spheroidal shape, to witness the ascent of which the pupils generally were admitted by purchased tickets.

At Easter, 1812, our drama was played on two successive nights, to audiences which made up by applause for what the drama and its adjuncts lacked in merit. Another performance followed at the ensuing Michaelmas, likewise made to admiring audiences, and a third and last took place at the Easter of 1813. This was naturally the longest and

most elaborate of all, the scenery more extensive, doubtless somewhat better painted, and the machinery much more complicated. The success was triumphant, the performance being extended to the fourth night, and our audiences more enthusiastic than ever. My father had indeed prohibited our selling tickets, so that the love of fame had been called on to supersede the desire of gain; but, on the third night, the audience made a voluntary collection, which was repeated on the fourth, and the amount thus received was sufficient to repay us for all expenses. As a pecuniary enterprise the project could not be regarded as successful, but the whole matter gave much pleasure, and did us all much good. I scarcely need add that all three plays were tragedies of a deep dye.

Early in the course of the above transactions I received my first watch, very much to my satisfaction and convenience. Unluckily, however, its workmanship was not what could be wished, and it soon appeared that though the one hand did its duty faithfully, the other was ever and anon playing the laggard. The watch was returned to the maker, with complaint of the fault, and after a while came back to me as cured, but, as the evil soon returned, I was put to my wits for a remedy. Some years before this I had constituted myself clock-cleaner to the family, being also, I may here observe, carpenter and locksmith-in-ordinary, but with a watch I had not yet ventured to meddle, lacking indeed all opportunity of doing so. Still, with my usual boldness, I went to work, took my watch to pieces so far as needful, and after careful examination detected the weak point. Just behind the dial there was a little too much space, which enabled one of the wheels to slip out of gear, and my remedy was simply to put in upon a spindle a small circular piece of latten

brass, duly pierced in the middle. This sufficed to keep the wheel in its place, and thenceforth the watch indicated time properly.

In the year 1812, Mr. Beasley projected a new school-atlas, and called upon me to undertake the work, which I did, nothing doubting my own ability, and little aware of the amount of labour involved in the task, still less of the difficulty arising from conflicting authorities. It was resolved, however, to proceed cautiously, and the maps were to be published one by one, in the hope that the sale of each would yield means for the production of its successor. As the Peninsular war (then at its height) was occupying much public attention, Spain and Portugal were taken first. In constructing the map, I found much difficulty from contending authorities, the latitude and longitude even of considerable towns being differently given. Doing, however, the best I could, I completed my task, and the map was published on the first of January, 1813, though not with such success as to justify further proceedings.

A year or two later, being then, I think, in my nineteenth year, I undertook the charge of the family finances. To my father accounts were but a necessary evil, and were treated accordingly; whereas they sorted well enough with my taste; and moreover I felt proud of the responsibility attached to them. I speedily established a cash account, in conjunction with my eldest brother. I got the bills written out in time to go home with the boys at the beginning of each vacation, which had not previously been attempted, and by that and other means, obtained such approach to punctuality in payment as soon enabled me to discharge a number of debts which had previously encumbered our family operations. These were mostly loans from various

relatives and other friends, who complimented me not a little on their repayment.

In January, 1815, my father gave a lecture on electricity to the Birmingham Philosophical Society, of which he was a Fellow, I performing the experiments. At that period the means of securing electrical action were either imperfect, or, at best, not very generally known. A previous attempt (by another Fellow of the Society) to give an illustrated lecture on the subject had utterly failed; and it was confidently believed by various members that, in the theatre of the institution at least, whether because of the crowded audiences usually attending the lectures, whether from insufficient ventilation, or from some unknown cause, all further attempt was useless. This stimulated my father to the effort, the more so as his successful lectures, previously mentioned, had been given under circumstances far more unfavourable. His credit was thus staked upon the issue, and he resolved, and I with him, that no effort should be spared to secure success. We carefully examined the whole of the Society's apparatus, and brought it into complete order. Remembering an exhibition of constellations at one of my father's former lectures, I went to work to prepare more, which I desired to make on a much larger scale; but glass, the material on which the tinfoil was laid, being not only inconveniently fragile, but at that time, on account of the high duty, an expensive article, I tried the substitution of cardboard, which fortunately I found to be, when quite dry, a satisfactory non-conductor. Using this, I produced several constellations of such size as to be well seen by a large body of spectators; and, which delighted me even more, I so arranged one, viz., that of the Great Bear, that while receiving the spark it was kept in constant revolution. At length we got everything

to do well ; but our elation at this preliminary success was considerably checked by hearing that our predecessor had thus far done as well as ourselves. This made us very anxious, and our care was redoubled. Observing that the lecture-table was covered with lead, surmounted with green baize, and fearing that this combination would in some measure rob our conductor (the nap acting as so many points), we covered the whole with glazed brown paper ; and again, anxious lest any accumulation of electric influence, either in the subjacent lead or elsewhere, might be troublesome, we crossed the table with a number of wires, which, being first brought into connection below, were passed through the floor, and lastly, being thrust into the spout of a pump in the basement, were brought into contact with the column of water within, so as to make our conduction, or rather abduction, complete. We also took advantage of a furnace, which had been set up behind the lecture-table for chemical purposes, to diffuse as much warmth as possible over our whole apparatus, that all dampness might be kept away.

At length the important night arrived, and notwithstanding all our precautions, we went to the lecture-room in great trepidation ; the whole family sharing our uneasiness. The clock struck seven, and the electrical machine, which had been kept near a large fire in the apparatus-room till the last moment, was carried in by the assistant, and attached to the table. The lecture began, and after perhaps ten minutes spent in introductory remarks and preliminary experiments with primitive means, the machine was set in motion, while we stood in breathless anxiety to watch the result. To our inexpressible relief we soon saw that it was in full power ; and experiment succeeded experiment without the slightest failure. All had proceeded well till about the middle of the

lecture, when suddenly the rod of the winch, which with superfluous caution had been made of glass, snapped in two, and the machine was brought to a stand. Though enough had been done to establish the success of our attempt, my father, naturally anxious to complete his lecture, and remembering that he was in the midst of a manufacturing town, inquired earnestly whether any one present could furnish a substitute of any description, however rude. One or two gentlemen immediately disappeared, and meantime my own machine, which had been brought as a provision against mishap, was used for some minor experiments, for which its power well sufficed. While this was going on my brother Edwin had carried the broken winch into a small workshop on the premises, and sawing off the leg of a stool, had shaped this at the ends, fitted it to the winch handle, and returning to the room, attached it to the socket on the axle of the machine, which again began to revolve, so that when our kind friends returned with their substitutes the necessity for them had passed away, and the lecture went on swimmingly to the end; my Great Bear, which was so far as I know a novelty, attracting particular attention, and eliciting, contrary to the rule and usage of the society, a round of applause.

One of the loudest foreboders of evil consoled himself for his error by remarking on the number of assistants "Hill" had had, adding that he had better have brought his wife and all his family to help him. So trifling a circumstance would not have been noticed here had it not touched the key-note of our success. In our course through life, from the beginning to the present hour, each one of us has been always ready to help the others to the best of his power; and no one has failed to call for such assistance again and again. Each one, I am

sure, recognises in this fact a main cause of such success as he has attained; and I cannot too emphatically declare that to mine it has been essential.

In the following January my father gave a second and last lecture on the same subject. Emboldened by our past success, we proceeded to experiments involving greater risk of failure; among others a thunder-cloud, which, to effect its discharge (whereby a model building was to be blown up with gunpowder), had to be moved by electric influence through a distance of not less, I think, than eight or ten feet. But the crowning illustration, with which the lecture concluded, was a revolving planisphere of my construction, four feet in diameter, and representing all stars, of not less than the fourth magnitude, within forty degrees of the South Pole. Wishing that the various magnitudes should appear in the illustration, I devised an arrangement for that purpose. For producing the sparks to represent stars of the first magnitude I cut the approaching edges of the tinfoil into a round shape, and placed them about one-twelfth of an inch asunder; for those of the second magnitude I gave the edges a pointed shape, also reducing the space between them to a minimum; for stars of the third and fourth magnitudes, while retaining the same arrangement, I produced further obscuration by covering the one with a single thickness, and the other with two thicknesses, of thin paper. To represent the Magellanic clouds was a more difficult matter; but here also I hit upon an expedient. Piercing the disc, in the proper places, with holes proportionate to the size and in the form of the respective nebulæ, I placed behind each hole in a plane parallel to that of the disc, and distant about half an inch from it, a piece of paper somewhat more than sufficiently large

to correspond with the perforation ; and I so arranged that this paper was illuminated by sparks at the back of the disc. When I add that the planisphere thus illuminated was at the same time kept in constant and equable revolution, I shall perhaps be regarded as justified in the belief entertained at the time that the whole result was a more exact representation of the starry heavens than had ever before been produced. The applause previously given to my Great Bear was more than redoubled on sight of my Southern Sky, and the lecture terminated amidst the congratulations of friends, and the warmest attestation of satisfaction from the audience generally, my father being, of course, greatly pleased, myself sufficiently elated, and the whole family triumphant. I may add that a full description of my planisphere will be found in the ' *Philosophical Magazine* ' for October, 1818.

There was a kind of interlude to these two lectures which perhaps should be mentioned. My eldest brother and I, who, on account of depressed health, had two years before been taken by my mother to Margate (much to my delight, as I then first saw the sea), were eager to repeat the trip ; and not having the means at hand, set about to acquire them. Availing ourselves of such of the apparatus, used at my father's late lecture and those delivered eight years before, as belonged to the family, we boldly determined to give four public lectures ourselves, the admission to be by purchased tickets. My brother was to do the speaking part, and I, as before, to manage the experiments. While, however, we made every preparation with great diligence, we unluckily had yet to learn that audiences are scarcely to be collected without full notice ; and our notification to the public was so short and imperfect that, when the day was close at hand, we found that either we must

be satisfied with an audience of thirty persons, or fill the schoolroom where the lecture was to be delivered by gratuitous admission. Taking this latter course, we performed to an audience which gave us abundant applause, but did little to forward our ulterior object. Nothing daunted, we resolved to try elsewhere, in a more advised manner, and being encouraged thereto by our friend Mr. Beasley, we proceeded, after due preparation of all sorts, to the little town of Stourbridge; hiring a man with a cart to convey the apparatus, and ourselves performing the journey on foot. Here our success was considerable; the result being due, I have no doubt, in great measure to our warm-hearted friend, who was an enthusiastic admirer of us both, and by no means kept his flattering estimate to himself.

Our total profits being sufficient to warrant the journey, we took it accordingly; intending thereby to get up such a stock of health as would carry us briskly through the next half-year. I cannot say, however, that its commencement tended much in that direction. Leaving Birmingham by stage-coach at half-past six in the evening, and designedly taking a route slightly circuitous, for the purpose of passing through Henley-on-Thames, of whose beauties we had heard much, we reached London at half-past three the next day. As the exhibition of the Royal Academy was to close finally that evening, we hastened, after a slight repast, to Somerset House, and after spending two or three hours there, not wishing to lose time, we went to one of the theatres, remaining to the very close of the performance—for in those days I, at least, never thought of leaving earlier—when we sallied forth to see a grand illumination then going on, viz., that for the great victory of Waterloo. During our stay at Margate we were fortunate enough to witness the first arrival of a

steamer plying on the Thames, which had made its trip from London in, I believe, about twelve or fourteen hours, exclusive of a pause during the night at Sheerness. Of course there was a great crowd and much enthusiasm on the occasion, though carpers predicted failure, and sneered at "smoke-jacks."

Soon after our return home, my constructive habits having been somewhat talked of in the neighbourhood, I was applied to by a lady to repair a quantity of electrical apparatus for the use of one of her sons. As I had then completed my nineteenth year, and had been in constant practice from the time of my earlier constructions, I accomplished this task, not certainly without labour, but without difficulty; and being well paid for my work, I gained, to use my own phrase at the time, "three guineas by the job."

In this year (1815) my father was elected honorary secretary to the Birmingham Institution for the Deaf and Dumb; and at the same time, on the recommendation of his predecessor, a sub-secretary was to be added, at the salary of 20*l.* a year. This post I gladly accepted, as it would make a very handsome addition to my pocket money. I soon found, however, that the duties were by no means merely nominal; the current labour being considerable, and the minutes, from the commencement of the Institution, which existed only in rough, having all to be transcribed. This appointment was very useful to me, as I was called upon to transact semi-public business, and was moreover, at the meetings of the Committee and elsewhere, brought into contact with men whose superior attainments made me feel keenly the necessity for increasing my own. This post I retained until the increasing demands of the school compelled me to give it up.

The year 1816, towards the end of which I at-

tained my majority, was even a busier time with me than the year before. While carrying on all my stated labours, I indulged my mechanical propensities by devising and constructing an alarum water-clock: as a complete description of this might weary the reader, I will give only a general conception of its structure. As already implied, the lapse of time was to be marked by the flow of water, and the most obvious difficulty being to render this equable, I employed for the purpose a floating syphon. The tube, which was so fine as to pass only about three drops per minute, was stuck through a flat piece of cork, which floated on the surface of water in a tin can; and as the water issued from the syphon it dropped into another can, though of much smaller size, hung at one end of a balance; so that, as this latter can filled, it became heavy enough to bear its own end of the beam down, while the opposite end, being of course tilted up, struck the trigger, which, as in ordinary alarums, released the weight, thus setting the clapper in motion. Now the length of time required to give the counterbalancing weight of water depended, of course, on the amount of weight put on the trigger-beam; and this was varied according to requirement, principally by means of a sliding weight, hanging from the beam as from a common steelyard. This sufficed so far as quarter hours were concerned, additional means of some complexity being used for securing the observance of smaller portions of time. The end was that I could count on being called within three or four minutes of the time fixed upon. In its early days, however, I was sometimes annoyed by irregularity, and, upon careful inspection, I perceived that this was caused by dust, which, falling into the water, found its way into the syphon, and impeded the flow. To remove this inconvenience, I enclosed my

alarm in a box, taking care also to change the water with sufficient frequency. I remember that on the evening when I first got the machine to work, not willing to leave my new light under a bushel, I fetched up half a dozen boys into the room where it stood, that they might see and admire. When I had explained the mechanism, and arranged for a *réveille* at the end of a quarter of an hour, the boys sat down in expectation; and probably being overworked, according to our practice at the time, one of them fell fast asleep. Great was my delight, and great the amusement of his companions, when at the end of the time, this, the first person ever awakened by alarm of mine, started up with a sudden exclamation of surprise and alarm, showing that my little machine had effectually performed its duty.

I may here remark, that for one machine that I executed there were many that I devised. Thus I find the following entry in my journal about a year later:—

‘*December 21st, 1817.*—I also wish to make a model of a boat to be driven by pumping [in] water at the prow and forcing it out at the stern. This is an idea of my father’s; and I think it will obviate the objection against driving canal boats by machinery, which is that the paddles agitate the water to such a degree as to injure the sides of the canal.’

A few years later I set down another first conception, this time of my own, which, however, I never carried further. The record is as follows:—

‘Steam vessels might be propelled by means of an endless screw, something like a corkscrew with the wire flattened in a direction perpendicular to the axis. There might be several fixed at the sides, at the stern, &c. This apparatus would work equally well whether altogether or partly immersed in water. If one could be placed so as to move like a rudder, it would be exceedingly efficient in changing the direction of the boat.’*

* Of course, I do not mean by these quotations to set up for my father or myself any claim to invention, seeing that we merely formed crude ideas which were never elaborated or even published.

About the same time there arrived in England an American lad named Zerah Colbourn, whose power in mental arithmetic was made the subject of public exhibition. As this was a department in which I had diligently exercised both myself and my pupils, I accompanied my father to the performance with great interest. We found that the boy's power consisted chiefly in finding with great rapidity the factors of numbers, and square and cube roots. I naturally tried my ability against his, and I found that so long as low numbers were dealt with, I equalled and even surpassed him in rapidity, but that he could deal effectually with numbers so high as to be far beyond my management. Thus he would rapidly extract the cube root of a number expressed in nine figures, provided always it were an exact cube, for with other numbers he declined to deal. His mode of proceeding was a secret, which, with some other devices, his father declared himself willing to reveal so soon as a subscription of, I think, one thousand pounds or guineas should have been raised. As this did not seem to me a very hopeful project, I came to the conclusion that my only way of becoming acquainted with the secret was to find it out for myself. I accordingly went to work, and soon discovered a mode of performing myself that which I had witnessed with so much wonder; and not content with this, proceeded to consider whether means might not be found for mentally extracting roots without limitation to exact cubes. This was an incomparably harder problem, nor did I arrive at its solution till a year or two later. Each process, as soon as discovered, I taught to my pupils, who in the easier task—all that Colbourn ever attempted—became more rapid and far more correct than Colbourn himself; for with him, in extracting a cube root expressed in three figures, it was a

common incident to fail in the second, an error which my pupils learned for the most part to avoid. I may add that some of them became so quick and accurate in both processes, that when on a public occasion, viz., at midsummer, 1822, printed tables of cubes and their roots had been placed in the hands of examiners, and questions asked therefrom, ranging up to two thousand millions, and of course without any limitation to exact cubes, the answers—fractions, however, being disregarded—were given so quickly as to lead some sceptics, little aware of the monstrous absurdity of the hypothesis, to declare that the whole must have been previously learned by rote.* I reduced my discovery to writing, intending to publish it in a contemplated manual of mental arithmetic;

* The mode of extracting the roots of *exact cubes* which I taught the boys, and which was probably that adopted by Zerah Colbourn, will be best shown by an example. Suppose the question to be, What is the cube root of 596,947,688? This looks like a formidable array of figures, and a schoolboy, resorting to the usual mode of extracting the root, would fill his slate with figures, and perhaps occupy an hour in the process. Zerah Colbourn or my class would have solved the question in a minute, and without making any figures at all. My class would have proceeded as follows. They would first fix in their memories the number of millions (596) and the last figure of the cube (8), disregarding all other figures. Then, knowing the cubes of all numbers from 1 to 10 inclusive, they would at once see that the first or left-hand figure of the root must be 8; and deducting the cube of 8 (512) from 596, they would obtain a remainder of 84. This they would compare with the difference between the cube of 8 (512) and the cube of 9 (729), that is to say, with 217; and seeing that it was nearly four-tenths of such difference, they would conclude that the second figure of the root was 4. The third or last figure of the root would require no calculation, the terminal figure of an *exact cube* always indicating the terminal figure of its root—thus 8 gives 2. The cube root, therefore, is 842. In this process there is some risk of error as regards the second figure of the root, especially when the third figure is large; but with practice an expert calculator is able to pay due regard to that and certain other qualifications which I could not explain without making this note unduly long. As already stated, Zerah Colbourn did occasionally blunder in the second figure; and this circumstance assisted me in discovering the above process, which I have little doubt is the one he followed. If, instead of an exact cube, another number of nine figures be taken, the determination of the third figure of the root, instead of being the easiest, becomes by far the most difficult part of the calculation.

but unfortunately this, with other papers, was lost in a manner never fully known, and to repeat the discovery I fear I should now find quite impracticable.

While on the subject of mental arithmetic, I may mention that I brought the pupils in my class to perform mentally other difficult calculations with a facility that excited no small surprise. Thus they would readily find the moon's age (approximately, by epacts) for any day of any year; also, the day of the week corresponding with any day of the month; and by a combination of the two processes, ascertain the day of the month corresponding with Easter Sunday in any year.

To return: in this year, 1817, with my father's consent, I introduced trial by jury into the school, arranging the rules of evidence according to his views, and appointing both a public prosecutor and a public defender; and here I may add that the plan, working well, continued in full operation for several years, until its chief evil—that of exposing an offender to public shame—led us, after trying several palliatives, gradually to reduce the institution to a court of appeal; in which shape, it at length fell, under my successors, for simple want of business, into disuse, no case having been brought before it, as I am informed (1869), for the last eleven years. This being my first mention of organic improvement in our school, I think it well to observe here that I either pass over such as were made by other members of my family or notice them but incidentally, since, however important they might be in themselves, they have no sufficient relation to this memoir.

In the same year I carried the self-government of the pupils a step farther, by establishing a school committee, and investing it with considerable power. In the mode of election I introduced a principle

which has of late received some public attention, though of course quite independently of our previous operations, viz., that of a graduated scale of franchise. According to my plan the highest pupil in the school elected one member, the next two a second, the next three a third, and so on. My successors, many years afterwards, while retaining the general principle, so far modified its application as to increase the number in the smallest constituent division to five; and with this change, and another important alteration rendering the election indirect, the plan, with other improvements mentioned in this narrative, is still in use at Bruce Castle, Tottenham, to which our school was eventually removed.

I likewise took means to improve the punctuality of the school, especially as regarded the matter of meals. The rule hitherto had been for the monitor to ring the bell when the meal was prepared. Backed by one of my brothers, who though not in the school yet lived at home and took great interest in its proceedings, I proposed that thenceforth the bell should be rung at the appointed time in all cases. I well remember how much my dear mother was startled at so bold an innovation, and what an outcry arose from the whole household. The point being yielded, however, to our urgency, though only temporarily as an experiment, the change was made, and the natural result followed. Dread of meeting a set of hungry lads with an empty table brought immediate punctuality, which was ever afterwards maintained.

Three years before, my eldest brother had instituted a kind of exhibition, to be held at the end of each half-year, on which occasion we had recitations, and such other exercises as might at once interest an audience and show the attainments of the pupils; the dramatic part being mostly prepared by himself, while the rest devolved mainly on me. Now

it so happened that towards the close of this year my brother being detained in London, whither he had gone to keep one of his terms—for he had already entered at Lincoln's Inn—and my father falling sick, nearly the whole charge fell upon me; and the consequent demand upon my time became so heavy, that when I was able, at the beginning of the holidays, to look back on my work, I found that I had been engaged during the last three weeks on an average eighteen hours per day, a fact which I might find it hard now to believe were it not duly recorded in my journal at the time.

In the midst of this bustle, however, occurred a little incident so characteristic of the period that it must not be omitted. It so happened that news had just arrived in the town of those political riots in London which led to the trial of the Watsons, father and son, on a charge of high treason; and my father's liberalism being well known, and of course grossly exaggerated, a report actually arose, within the day, that the firing with which the boys thought proper to celebrate my birthday was an expression of sympathy with the outbreak.

In the same year I also made my first survey of any consequence, having learned the art as best I could—I might almost say found it out—for I had then no book on the subject, and my father had no special knowledge of the matter. I had previously taken a class to measure and map the playground and some little of the immediate neighbourhood, but opportunity now arose for a more extended operation, and I was not slow to seize it.

A remarkable murder took place about four miles off, and excited great public interest. The name of the victim was Mary Ashford. Thornton, the man charged with the crime, and whom the whole neighbourhood believed to be guilty, got off at the

trial by setting up an alibi. So strong was the feeling excited by this escape, that it was resolved to resort to the long-disused right of appeal, and a subscription being speedily raised to defray the expenses, the necessary proceedings were commenced. This startling course brought the matter into the London papers, and interest became general. Illustrated journals there were none, but my drawing-master published a portrait of the poor girl—taken I suppose after death—with a view of the pond in which the body was found; and one of the Birmingham newspapers (the *Midland Chronicle*) gave a rude plan of the ground on which the chief incidents occurred. This, however, being apparently done without measurement, and not engraved either on wood or copper, but made up as best could be done with ordinary types, was of course but a very imperfect representation. I resolved to improve upon this, and in conjunction with a former schoolfellow, to whom, though he was much older than myself, I was then giving private lessons in surveying, I led my class to the spot, took the measurements, and constructed a complete map, not merely of the spot where the murder was committed, but of the neighbourhood so far as to include the place of the alleged alibi. This was published not only in Birmingham but also in London, and we cleared about fifteen pounds by the enterprise. It may be convenient to the reader to add, though this has nothing to do with my story, that when the case of appeal came before the Court of King's Bench, Thornton, throwing down his glove in due form, demanded wager of battle; and as this barred all other measures, while of course the age of ordeals was past, the proceedings came to an end, and the prisoner was released. However, he never again ventured to show himself near the scene of his

alleged crime, and a year or two afterwards was reported to have died in America. In the next session of parliament an Act was passed abolishing wager of battle, and with it the right of appeal. I remember that our family verdict on the subject condemned the latter half of this measure.

Encouraged by the success of this undertaking, the engraver whom we had employed urged us to make a complete survey of Birmingham, proposing that we should join him in publishing the resulting map, and to this we agreed—my associate, who had leisure, undertaking the chain-work, while I was to do the trigonometrical part, and to help so far as needful in the plotting. I now therefore made my first trigonometrical survey; taking my first stations on our own playground (which fortunately commanded a view of many of the principal objects in the town), and, as before, engaging my surveying class in the work, both for their instruction and my own assistance.

This occupation led me to inquire into the great trigonometrical survey then carried on by Colonel Mudge, especially that part of it which related to the neighbourhood of Birmingham, my chief object being to ascertain what records would avail for our map, and what further steps it would be needful for me to take to complete the work. With this view I procured his report, and studied it with care, finding it more interesting than any novel. I read with particular interest the part describing the measurement of the great base line on Hounslow Heath by his predecessor, General Roy; and I gathered from it that my own base lines, taken one on our playground and the other on the opposite side of Birmingham, were far too short, the longer extending to only one hundred-and-thirty feet. I therefore resolved to recommence my work, and not only to take a much

longer base line, but also to measure it as accurately as I could. I now give a passage taken from my journal, and I may here mention that I began this record of my doings when I was about seventeen, prefixing to it from recollection some account of my previous life, and that I continued it, with more or less of interruption, to the age of twenty-seven. I scarcely need add that it has been used as the basis of the present memoir.

‘I accordingly procured some long deal rods and three stools for the purpose of measuring a line with great accuracy. The stools are made to rise and fall, and somewhat resemble music-stools; this construction was necessary, in order to place the rods always upon the same level.*

‘I chose Bromsgrove Street as the situation of the base, on account of its remarkable levelness, and the number of objects which are visible from different parts of it. The base extends from the corner of the Bell Inn, on the right-hand side of the Bristol Road, and opposite to the end of Bromsgrove Street, to the wall at the north-eastern end of Smithfield; being nearly half a mile in length, and so admirably situated with respect to the objects, that there is not a single obtuse angle upon it.

‘Besides measuring with the rods, I surveyed the line twice with a land chain, properly adjusted, and after making every allowance for the elongation of the chain during the admeasurement, I found the difference in the total length of the base, which is nearly half a mile, to be only three-quarters of an inch. When the survey is completed, I intend to write an account of it, which will be found among my manuscripts.†

* This expression is not strictly correct, as it was impossible to maintain absolutely the same level throughout without using stools of an unmanageable height. What was done was to keep the rods in a right line until a new gradient was designedly taken; the angle of rise or fall being in each instance carefully measured, and the whole afterwards reduced by computation to the exact horizontal distance. It may be added, that in order to make due allowance for the elongation or contraction of the rods by change of temperature, thermometers were attached to the apparatus, and the rise and fall of the mercury duly recorded.

† These manuscripts were unfortunately destroyed two years afterwards in a fire which will be mentioned hereafter, and with them perished not only my water-alum, but also my planispheres, and various other results of past labour.

‘I have thought of publishing parts of it in some of the magazines, particularly a relation of a new mode of using the theodolite, which I have invented. This mode increases its power exceedingly.’

In performing this work it was of course necessary to avoid the daily traffic, which would have disturbed our operations; and as my journal shows, my class and I, during the three days occupied in the process, viz., May the 25th, 27th, and 30th, rose the first day at three, the second at five minutes before three, and the third at five minutes past two.

The improved mode of using the theodolite referred to above consisted in making it do the work of a repeating circle; and thus I was enabled, with respect to each of the principal angles, to obtain the mean of perhaps twenty measurements. I may here mention that the fact of this contrivance happened, on a subsequent occasion, to do me good service. Some years afterwards, being in London, I wished to visit the Royal Observatory, and procuring a letter of introduction to Captain Kater, then a member of the Board of Longitude, I applied to him for an order. With all the politeness that can attend a negative, he told me that the Astronomer Royal (Mr. Pond) had been so much interrupted of late as to deprecate any further issue of orders save in cases of absolute necessity. As some consolation, however, he offered to show me his own apparatus; which, I need not say, I examined with great interest. In the course of conversation I mentioned my new device, when, turning to me with a look of great pleasure, he told me that he had hit upon the same improvement himself. Before I left he sat down and wrote the order; of which I did not fail to make use. I may add that at a later period he visited the school (which however in the mean time had been removed, enlarged, and much improved), subsequently placed a son

under our care, and continued till death to honour me with his friendship.

To return to the survey, I give a second extract from my journal:—

‘*June 23rd, 1819.*—This day I completed the calculations for the trigonometrical survey of Birmingham and some parts of the adjoining country.

‘After completing the survey of the town, I thought it desirable to extend it for the purpose of verifying the admeasurement of the base, by computing the length of two lines which were measured by Colonel Mudge. These are the distance [the respective distances] of Wolverhampton and Wednesbury spires from a station at Bar beacon. Colonel Mudge has left no mark to show the situation of his station; he describes it indeed, but not with very great precision. He says in his report, “The station is thirty yards north of the plantation.” I have supposed his description to be exactly correct, that is, that the station was placed directly north of the centre of the plantation, and thirty yards from the nearest part of the clump of trees. If this be correct the station would stand fifty-six yards directly north of the flagstaff, and this I have supposed to be its situation.

‘The distance of Wolverhampton spire from the station at Bar beacon, Colonel Mudge gives at 48,345 feet. This, reduced to the distance from the flagstaff, gives 48,355 feet.

‘By my operations I make the distance to be 48,362 feet, differing by only seven feet in upwards of nine miles. The distance of Wednesbury spire from the station at Bar beacon is, according to Colonel Mudge, 25,140 feet. This, reduced to the distance from the flagstaff, is 25,098 feet. I have found the same line to measure 25,102 feet, differing by only four feet in nearly five miles.*

* * * * *

‘Besides measuring these distances, I reduced the latitude and longitude of St. Philip’s church, and of the station on this house [my father’s], from the latitude and longitude of Bar beacon as given by Colonel Mudge.†

* Colonel Mudge’s ‘Report of the Trigonometrical Survey of England and Wales,’ vol. iii., p. 156.

† Alphabetical Index to the third volume of the ‘Report.’

One other line measured in the course of my operations (I think it was the one from the station on Bar beacon to that on Clent Hill near Hagley) was of yet greater length than those mentioned above; being no less than fourteen miles. Indeed the triangles became so large that I had to make allowance for spherical excess, the rotundity of the earth becoming otherwise a source of error.

Whenever it was practicable I measured all three angles of each triangle; and after allowance for the spherical excess, there was no instance, I believe, in which the sum of the three angles differed from 180° by so much as half a minute.

Those possessed of such instruments as are used at the present day will perhaps smile at the self-satisfaction with which I regarded this approximate accuracy; but they must remember that I had only a common theodolite, such as was in use fifty years ago.

It may be mentioned here that, on account of the length of the lines, communication between our stations was a matter of some difficulty and much interest. When two divisions of the surveying class had to set out in different directions for places many miles apart, for the purpose of acting in concert with each other of course a certain amount of forethought and injunction before starting, and sharp watchfulness on the spot, were indispensable: spare flags were carried for telegraphic purposes, and telescopes for observation of the signals previously agreed upon. I need not say that each signal at one station was eagerly welcomed at the other, and that its repetition, given by way of acknowledgment at the latter, was no less warmly hailed at the former.

There was a little incident on this occasion which, though somewhat foreign to my subject, I mention as ludicrously characteristic of schoolboy *esprit de corps* according to its manifestation fifty years ago.

I understand the feeling is now much mitigated, without however being injuriously impaired. In the midst of our proceedings at Bar beacon the pupils of another school came upon the ground, being apparently out for a holiday. A feeling of hostility soon manifested itself in our party, and that without any other provocation from the other side than arose from mere presence; and though the rival party mustered at least three-fold our number it was soon suggested, no doubt half in joke, that we should challenge them to fight; if I would only deal with the master a good account should soon be given of all the rest. This absurd petition being of course rejected, a more peaceful means was hit upon for the vindication of our honour. The hill on which we stood was, and perhaps still is, surmounted by a flagstaff sixty or seventy feet high, by means of which it was announced to the world round about whether the family at the neighbouring hall were at home or otherwise. About half-way up this standard was a small platform, accessible by a perpendicular ladder; and to this one of our number, I believe the youngest, proceeded to mount, descending after a short stay. Though not a word was said, the hint was immediately taken by the other party, one of whom repeated the feat. A second of our number was likewise followed by a second of theirs; but a third finding no imitator, the victory remained with us. Further, however, to enhance the triumph, the little fellow who had made the first ascent, having remounted to the platform, "swarmed" up thence to the top of the pole; returning to the ground with no small self-satisfaction. As no similar attempt was made by the rival party, enough was thought to have been done for the honour of the school; and when we left the ground, it was with the dignified air of demonstrated superiority.

Before leaving the subject of surveys, I may men-

tion that I afterwards led my class to measure and plot, with sections longitudinal and transverse, so much of the Ickenield Street as then remained on Sutton Coldfield, the length being about three miles; and lastly, that at the request of Dr. Blair, now well known to every reader of the life of Professor Wilson, we made a survey underground, viz., of a coal-pit, his property, near Dudley. This, though a dark and dirty piece of work, was much enjoyed by the lads, the more so as at the close of their task they were plentifully regaled at Dr. Blair's hospitable table.

These operations extended over a portion of 1818 and 1819.

A little incident which occurred during the survey on Sutton Coldfield may be worth mentioning. A farmer coming up towards the close of our operations asked what we were doing, and upon being told that we were surveying the Roman road, inquired, "What's that?" At this time, the sun, being low in the sky, threw the depressed parts of the road into sufficient shadow to bring out alike the convexity of the carriage-way and the comparative elevation of the causeways on either side. So that the road, not easily discernible in the full light of day, had now its outlines distinctly marked. The answer, therefore, was easy, and pointing to the long line of road stretched before us, I replied, "There it is." The rustic looked in the direction indicated, and after gazing for a while in bewildered surprise, exclaimed, "Good God, I have crossed this way every day for twenty years, and never saw that before!"

In the midst of these proceedings I introduced fresh improvements into the school. One of these was a system of voluntary work; the object being to obviate the necessity of so much corporal punishment as was then in use in our school, in common, so far as I know, with all others. Some attempt at such

supercession had been made long before by my father, and with some success, though not by the same means. I now sought to extend it much further. I therefore made arrangements by which a boy might, so to speak, run up a score of merit, available in discharge of penalty for subsequent offences. On producing the result of any kind of useful work, provided it appeared in a complete state, and had been executed in leisure hours, a pupil received, in proportion to the quantity and quality of the work, a sum in a coinage peculiar to the school, and current within it, the chief value of which consisted in the use indicated above; though, as from their very nature the coins were transferable, they could of course be sold or given away. At first the work brought up consisted principally of mere transcription, so as somewhat to resemble the impositions in use elsewhere; but soon, drawing, planning, mapping, and other kinds of graphic work, began to follow; afterwards composition in prose and verse, reports of translations, principally from Latin and French, lectures and recitations of poetry, took their turn; while perhaps the most common occupation was the perusal of books belonging to the school library, with subsequent examination on their contents. Some years later, in order at once to render this more systematic, and to remove the risk of fraudulent repetition of the same book, I drew up with much care a "reading course," so arranged as to mingle fiction with fact, in such manner that the former should aid the latter rather than pervert it, introducing at the same time a certain amount of popular science. The construction of models of buildings and machines was the favourite employment of some; one of those going so far as to produce a working model of a high-pressure steam-engine;* and others,

* The boy's name was Follett Osler. Some years later he invented

following the example already mentioned, undertook minute surveys. One sequel of this plan (it might be too much to call it a consequence) I mention with the permission of the gentleman concerned. Amongst those who adopted drawing as his chief occupation was a little boy, who up to that time had shown no particular aptitude for any kind of study. Here, however, he succeeded so well as soon to attract no small attention. His power was fostered then and afterwards, and painting eventually became his profession; of his eminence in the art I need not speak, the works of Thomas Creswick needing no eulogy.

In short, means of atoning for breach of laws became so abundant, that corporal punishment rapidly declined, and in two years from this time was formally abolished for ever. I may add that neither I nor any one of my successors ever regretted the change.

This diminution of severity rendered it practicable to increase the amount of self-government, and a police was established among the boys; the highest officer, "magistrate," as he was somewhat ostentatiously called, being chosen by the committee of boys before mentioned; and the plan, though certainly at times falling far short of our expectations, yet tended, in no small degree, to the maintenance of order and propriety; and I may add, that with some changes in its machinery, it is still in use.

Another change consisted in an arrangement for establishing among the pupils, on what we regarded as just principles, a general order of precedence, to be followed in awarding all privileges, including also prizes, which had hitherto been given, as elsewhere, according to proficiency in the several departments of

and constructed the Anemometer which bears his name. Mr. Osler has long been a Fellow of the Royal Society.

study. For this purpose, I adopted a plan somewhat similar, I believe, to that now followed in the Middle Class Examinations of Oxford and Cambridge, whereby examinations in various departments are made to yield a general result. The most important difference was that, in my plan, one department was that of moral conduct, to which moreover great weight was given. To effect this the masters, twice in each half-year, held a conference on the comparative merits of the pupils, giving to each boy his place on the list according to their judgment. To aid in this adjudication, memoranda were soon found desirable; and this led to the keeping of an account, called the ledger of conduct, in which entries were systematically made. The whole plan was afterwards very much improved; but as this was principally the work of one of my brothers, not of myself, I carry my account no further than to mention one other change of my own, made, however, many years later. In the outset it had been our practice, after making the above-mentioned arrangement of the boys, to comment on the conduct of each in the presence of the whole school; but, by the change in question, the pupils were taken severally, so that the remarks of the officiating master were made in strict privacy; a practice found to be at once more beneficial, and more pleasant to the boys; especially, of course, in cases where the report was unfavourable.

Meanwhile, I had for some time been preparing for a change referred to above. Our school, having by this time risen far above the humble institution spoken of in the outset, we had resolved in the previous year (1817) on building a larger, better, and more commodious house, about two miles off, and on a spot then quite in the country. As the duty of architect devolved entirely on me, I had fallen to drawing plans, designing elevations, &c., and after

much labour—for I believe I drew at least twenty plans in all—my work being in a sufficiently forward state, a builder was applied to for an estimate ; but the amount he named being too large for our means, I had gone to work a second time, and formed, after many attempts at economy, an entirely new set of plans, which considerably lowered the estimate ; and on the more moderate expense we resolved to venture.

It was in the summer of 1818 that the building began. My father having found that, with but slight deviation from the line of road, the house might be made to stand in exact coincidence with the cardinal points, would, I believe, from that moment, have been almost more willing to abandon the scheme than to lose such an opportunity of gratifying his taste. For this purpose astronomical observations were necessary ; and my father, my brother Frederic, and I, sat up the whole of one night (July 3rd) to determine the meridian. Of course the middle part of the night was unoccupied, but excitement kept us awake ; and my brother Frederic, then a lad of fifteen, no more sleepy than the rest, passed the time in ascertaining by measurement and mental calculation the number of bricks already on the ground. Such calculations occupying the restless hours of the night, were too common with more than one member of our family, and most of all, I believe, with myself. One night, some time after this, when the building was completed, I passed a sleepless period in reckoning up mentally the total payment to be made for painting, colouring, and whitewashing the house from top to bottom. Having made the plans, I had all the dimensions in memory ; but the number of rooms being large, their dimensions exceedingly various, and the charge per square yard differing also in respect of the de-

scription of paint used, number of coats, &c., there was of course a good deal of complication. The calculation was however completed. On the presentation of the bill I found that the amount somewhat exceeded my calculation, but I soon detected certain charges made contrary to agreement; and this error being admitted by the contractor, the excess above my estimate became so trifling that the bill was paid without further examination.

To return a little, I must mention that besides being architect, I found myself compelled to act as clerk of the works; as without sharp daily inspection—hourly would have been better, if I could have spared the time—there were constant departures from the contract; some of which would have proved very injurious to the building. As I had the main responsibility of the school during most of the time, and no vehicle at command, the two miles and back having therefore always to be performed on foot, the work was very heavy; though probably the exercise involved was beneficial. In July, 1819, the house being finished, to which we gave the name of Hazelwood, the school was removed thither; and in our larger and more commodious premises we were enabled to make various improvements hitherto impracticable.

About this time I devised a plan for lessening the number of pugilistic combats among the boys. Hitherto there had been a sort of loose prohibition, the main effect of which had been merely to drive such conflicts into secrecy; the truth being revealed only by visible results when the affair was over. Convinced that the evil could not be wholly prevented, I resolved to bring it under regulation, and applying to the committee of boys previously mentioned, I procured the establishment of the following rules:—First, that while all absolute prohibition was

to be withdrawn, a fight should be deemed illegal, and strictly punished, unless taking place according to prescribed regulation. Second, that notice of intention to fight should be given to "the magistrate," and six hours allowed before the combat took place. Third, that in the mean time it should be the duty of "the magistrate" to inquire into the cause of quarrel, and reconcile the parties if practicable. Fourth, that if the combat could not be thus prevented, it should take place on a retired spot selected for the purpose, none to be present save "the magistrate" and his two assistants, all the other boys being meanwhile confined to the schoolroom, so as to have no chance whatever of witnessing the affray. The plan proved successful, legalized combats gradually diminishing in number until such an event became quite rare; irregular battles, especially by premeditation, becoming still rarer. This plan, with the single modification that the superintendence at the fight is altogether withdrawn from the boys, is still in use at Bruce Castle, where I learn that combats of any kind have been for many years almost unknown.

Another improvement almost coincident with this was a further progress in punctuality, especially in the return of the pupils after the vacation, which hitherto had been very irregular, according to the general if not universal practice of the time. The mode taken was, first, to impress upon the pupils the importance of the duty, and, secondly, to give the term "punctuality" its precise meaning, by reducing the time for arrival to a point, the pupils being informed of the exact moment by which they were expected, and warned that when the moment came the schoolroom door would be closed, and all not then within its walls accounted too late. Certain moderate consequences also as regards standing were to depend upon observance. Lastly, the requirement was noti-

fied to the parents of each boy, with a premonition that non-arrival would be followed by a letter of inquiry as to cause of absence. Beyond our expectation, we found parents very willing to co-operate, whilst among the boys such a spirit was awakened, that even the few cases of parental opposition were for the most part overborne by filial importunity. Following up this success, with other arrangements to induce punctuality in general, we speedily obtained such exact observance of times throughout the whole school periods, as was then probably almost without parallel.

Certain of the boys wishing to begin a school magazine, I established a printing-press, which, with some assistance, I taught the boys to use; and in due time two or three volumes thus printed made their appearance, the typography, however, being of course such as would have gained but small approbation from a regular workman, though one or two etchings, executed by the higher draughtsmen in the school, were thought to be well done.

Lastly, an arrangement was made by which we placed a weekly sum of money, varying in amount according to the conduct of the school, at the disposal of the school committee already mentioned, for the purchase of additions to the library, to the philosophical apparatus, to the appliances for bodily exercise, or such other means of instruction or legitimate recreation as they might fix upon. By this institution, which is still maintained, successive committees of boys (generally indeed presided over by a master, but still free in action) must have disposed of little less, perhaps more, than four thousand pounds.

It was now resolved to publish some account of these improvements and the principles on which they were based; and indeed my eldest brother, who though already at the bar, had as yet, like other

young barristers, a certain amount of spare time, had been for a considerable period engaged upon a work on the subject, to which I also contributed such portion as referred to details of our system; and the manuscript, so far as it was then completed, had been fortunate enough to receive the warm approbation of Miss Edgeworth. This work at length appeared in June, 1822, under the title of ‘*Public Education*,’ the name and place of the school, however, being for the time suppressed, though certainly not so carefully concealed but that a diligent inquirer might find them out. The book soon attracted much public attention, due in no small degree to the interest at once taken in it by Lord Brougham (then Mr. Brougham) and Jeremy Bentham; this latter gentleman declaring, in a letter to Dr. Parr, that its perusal had caused him to throw aside all that he himself had previously written on the subject. It was soon after this that we received the visit from Captain Kater already referred to, which happened also to be coincident with one from Captain Basil Hall, each spending many hours in examining the school, and the latter delighting the boys with a lively and interesting lecture on the Trade Winds.

Of the result of Captain Kater’s visit I have already spoken, but that of Captain Basil Hall’s was more important, viz., the appearance in January, 1825, of a favourable article in the ‘*Edinburgh Review*,’ referring, though not by name, to Captain Basil Hall as authority for some of its statements. This drew so much attention to the school as speedily to enlarge its prospects beyond all past expectation, the effect being also strengthened by notices in other publications, and particularly by a very able and elaborate article in the ‘*London Magazine*,’ from the pen of De Quincy, which appeared in January, 1826.

Among other consequences of the great increase

in the number of our pupils which then occurred was of course a great enlargement of the house, carrying it far beyond the dimensions previously rejected as too expensive. Some augmentation had been made within two years of our removal, when the upper part of the house had to be rebuilt after its destruction by a fire which commenced in the roof. The cause of the fire was never discovered, though there was great reason to attribute it to spontaneous combustion. Certainly at the time it put my life in considerable danger.

When the fire had made some progress, happening at the moment to be on the lawn, giving directions, I suddenly learnt that a life was in jeopardy, a woman being left in a room within the roof, accessible only through that which was on fire. This was a poor sempstress, who, being in a weak state of health, had been detained in the house the evening before, a bed being made up for her, and one of the maid-servants sleeping with her as companion and nurse; and this latter it was who, having herself escaped, after in vain urging the poor invalid to follow her, now gave the alarm. Of course, an immediate impulse carried me towards the spot; but as I mounted the stairs, I found my father, who had also taken the alarm, on the way before me, and he generously endeavoured to thrust me back, but this it was impossible to allow; my duty as a son, and my superior agility as a young man, alike urged me forward. Not a moment was to be lost. Passing through smoke so dense that I could scarcely see even the glare of the fire, I was happily able to reach the chamber where the poor creature yet lay on her bed, overcome with fright and weakness, and to bear her back through the still thickening smoke, both falling exhausted as we reached the staircase. We soon recovered breath, but to her the benefit

was but small, as the sickness from which she was suffering, augmented, it is to be feared, by fright and partial suffocation, terminated fatally within a week.

To return to the more immediate results of our publication, we soon had the gratification to learn that several men of high standing, besides those already mentioned, especially amongst the Liberal party, were taking more or less interest in our proceedings, several of them even coming to inspect the school, amongst others, Wilberforce, the venerable champion of negro emancipation, and Grote, the future historian of Greece. Foreign pupils, also, then not so common in England as now, began to arrive; and brother educators, English and foreign, began to apply personally or by letter for further information. An article on the book appeared in the '*Revue Encyclopédique*,' the editor, M. Julien, having previously paid us a visit. The work was translated into Swedish by Count Frölich; and Professor Sæve, of the University of Upsala, came and stayed with us a month, diligently taking notes, with a view, afterwards realised, to the establishment of a similar institution near Stockholm; our plans being also, as we learned, partially adopted in other schools, both at home and abroad.

In the year 1825 we had begun to consider the expediency of removing the school to the neighbourhood of London, whence a large portion of our pupils was now drawn, and after a long and laborious search for suitable premises, we fell at length, as it were by accident, upon the house at Tottenham already mentioned. I scarcely need add that we were not a little elated at procuring a place with a history attached to it, and bearing by right the honoured name of Bruce.*

* See Lyson's '*Environs of London*' and the '*Beauties of England and Wales*.'

In the mean time, I had necessarily paid many visits to London, and in the course of these had acquired much information, and made many acquaintances, which were subsequently useful to me. In November, 1826, I attended a meeting preparatory to the establishment of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge; which, coming into existence in the following year, took so active and important a part in the creation of cheap literature. Though, as a member of the committee, I took some share in the duty, I fear, upon reflection, that such aid as I was enabled to give was scarcely equivalent to the benefit which I derived from association with the able and eminent men with whom I was thus brought in contact; not a few of whom, indeed, afterwards rendered me valuable assistance in the chief work of my life.

Early in the spring of 1827, the purchase of Bruce Castle being complete, I finally left Hazelwood to take possession of my new abode, and for four months was busily employed in adapting the building to its new purposes; again, therefore, bringing into exercise that practice of mechanical contrivance to which I have so frequently referred before, and on which my success throughout life has so much depended. The new school opened satisfactorily after the midsummer vacation, and this was the scene of my labours for the six following years.

My narrative now brings me to the most important event of my life, viz., my marriage, which took place in the autumn of this year; nor can I record it without adding that my dear wife's help in my subsequent toils, and not least in those best known to the public, was important, perhaps essential, to their success. Her father, the late Mr. Joseph Pearson, whom I had known from the days of my early childhood, and whom I regarded throughout

life with esteem and affection, was in Wolverhampton, the town near to which he resided, the recognised leader of the Liberal party, and at a later period, when the town became enfranchised, was the standing chairman of the committee for returning the Liberal candidates. In one of my letters at this time to my intended wife I mentioned incidentally that the interval between the delivery and despatch of General Post letters at Bruce Castle was only two hours (no unfair specimen of the state of things at the time); little thinking then that it would devolve on me to devise and apply the remedy, and as little that this would be done with such effect as eventually to increase the interval fourfold.

I shall not narrate the general history of my proceedings at Bruce Castle, partly because, for the sake of convenience, I have already trenched upon it, and partly because what remains untold is perhaps too much like the preceding part to be further interesting. I will mention, however, that during a portion of 1829 and throughout the two following years, having about seven years before become a member of the Astronomical Society, I occupied part of my leisure hours in devising means of measuring time, in connection with astronomical observations, more minutely than had hitherto been done. With this view I tried many experiments, and succeeded in carrying accuracy of measurement first to one-tenth, and by a subsequent improvement to one-hundredth of a second. In June, 1832, I addressed a letter to the Council of the Astronomical Society, showing the principle of my device, which is in some measure indicated by the name I gave it, viz., the “*Vernier pendulum*,” and applying for the loan of one of the Society’s clocks, with a view to further experiment. This being granted, I continued my

investigation for some time, when it was brought to a close by a circumstance which, combined with others, changed my whole course of life. I shall, therefore, only further remark that as the letter just mentioned records a piece of work to which I gave much time and thought, and of which I felt then, and perhaps feel still, a little proud, I have given it in the Appendix A. My invention, I must add, never came into use, being superseded by an adaptation of electricity to the same purpose, which, while equal in accuracy, had the advantage of much readier use.

My health, which had already twice broken down under the weight of my work, now began to show signs of permanent injury; and I was becoming sensible of the necessity for some change, though to obtain this was no easy matter. Simple rest, I feared, would not answer the purpose, as my mind was likely, by mere force of habit, to revert to my suspended duties, and moreover to busy itself with anxiety about the little family now depending upon me. Change of occupation was therefore what I sought, and this was one motive to the astronomical investigations previously referred to. I found, however, that so long as I remained at my post there was small hope of substantial benefit, and I began to consider the means of release. In 1831 I had prepared for Lord Brougham a paper which I entitled 'Home Colonies: Sketch of a Plan for the Gradual Extinction of Pauperism and for the Diminution of Crime.' And this, with Lord Brougham's consent, was published in 1832.* My hope in writing it, beyond that of doing good, had been that it might lead to my temporary employment by Government in examination of the Home Colonies of Holland, which were at that time attracting much public at-

* Published by Simpkin and Marshall.

tention, and seemed to afford valuable suggestions for the improvement of our own poor law administration, then, as is well known, in a lamentable state. One great object of the plan, as set forth in my pamphlet, was the education of the pauper colonists. The pamphlet excited a certain amount of interest, as well among working-men as those higher in society; but I had yet to learn how strongly the doors of every government office are barred against all intruders, and how loud and general must be the knocking before they will open. I must, in fairness, add that I had also to be made aware how much official doors are beset by schemers, and how naturally groundless projects raise a prejudice against all proposals whatever. Any one curious on the subject may find some notice of the plan in the 'Penny Magazine,' vol. i. p. 42. However, I scarcely need add that no result followed either to the public or to myself, the evils which I had sought to mitigate being otherwise grappled with in the poor law reform of 1834.

Meantime my malady increased, and it was at length determined that the school at Hazelwood, which had hitherto been carried on concurrently, should be disposed of, and the removal to Bruce Castle made complete; the middle of 1833 being fixed upon as the time for the change. My intention was to employ the whole of the midsummer holidays, and as much more time as I could profitably so spend, in a tour on the Continent, leaving the question of my return to be decided by the state of my health and other circumstances. I had begun to feel unsettled in my occupation. In addition to its wearing effect upon my health, I had begun to doubt the expediency of my continuing in a profession into which I had entered rather from necessity than from choice, though I had subsequently laboured in it, like

other members of my family, with zeal and even enthusiasm, and in which the very progress made by the school in public estimation made my position on some important points increasingly uncomfortable. This pressed the more after the untimely death of one of the two brothers associated with me at Bruce Castle, the youngest of our family, who, having enjoyed many of those advantages in education which were denied to me, had been as it were my complement. It is true, indeed, that the accession of my brother Arthur from Hazelwood brought present relief, but this also facilitated my withdrawal, giving me as a successor one whose heart I knew to be fully and fixedly engaged in his work, who, indeed, carried government by kindness and other important principles much further than I had ever thought practicable, and who, I may add, remained at his post until age warned him to retire; lastly, the three years that intervened between our sad loss and this recruit had made a change in my feelings which time was not likely to reverse. Moreover, my ambition had grown with our success, or rather, indeed, far outrun it; and I was now thoroughly convinced—partly I must admit by a check in our tide of success—that in my present career, unless I could add to my other qualifications a far greater amount of those acquirements which rank highest in general estimation, it could have no sufficient scope. I think, indeed, I was perfectly honest in saying, as I did at the time, that neither wealth nor power was my main object, though I was not insensible to the allurements of either, but that it was indispensable to my desires to do, or at least to attempt, something which would make the world manifestly the better for my having lived in it. What that was to be I could by no means tell, further than that it must be some work of organiza-

tion, which I knew to be my forte; but that point secured, I still felt, notwithstanding my impaired health, my old unlimited confidence as to achievement. All this may have been very rash, and even foolish; I merely mention it as a fact, and look upon it as turning out fortunate, since it was essential to the sequel.

Although, however, I separated myself from duties in which I had been earnestly engaged for three-and-twenty years, I have never lost interest in the school, nor ever failed to render it such assistance as lay in my power; I gladly hailed the early return of its prosperity, and at the end of thirty-six years from my withdrawal I rejoice to see it still flourishing, and this under the management of one who, inheriting his profession and his post, has been trained under the system which he has to administer, is deeply imbued with its principles, and has been fortunate enough to receive in addition those higher advantages of academical education which to me never came even within the range of hope.

I had spent some weeks in France, without, however, having gone further than Orleans (travelling was slow in those days), when an opportunity for such a change as I was revolving in my mind happened to present itself. A project was forming for the colonisation of the then unoccupied territory now called South Australia, the prime mover being the late Mr. Edward Gibbon Wakefield, with whom I had previously some acquaintance, and who, indeed, had shown me a year before a prospectus of his enterprise, in which, however, all places for names, whether directors or officers, were then vacant. Meeting him now in France, I was invited by him to join in the scheme, being also assured that several men of high character and position had already done so. His proposal was that, in the event of his project being

launched, I should be secretary in England ; while another gentleman, the late Mr. Gouger, was to be secretary in the new colony. Though very unwilling to cut my holiday so short, yet fearing that if I missed this opportunity I might not soon find another equally promising, I determined on accepting the offer, and went forthwith to my new work.

The change was obviously a very great one, and it was to be seen how far my past training, if I may apply the term to what was in so large a degree fortuitous, had fitted me for the duties that now devolved upon me. Necessity had taught me diligence, punctuality, and perseverance ; and combined with inclination, and perhaps some natural aptitude, it had cultivated in me the power and habit of invention, created a certain versatility, and armed me with boldness to surmount obstacles, to disregard mere conventionalisms, and to feel and exercise a certain independence of spirit. I had also been led to acquire a power of influencing and directing others, and of holding subordinates to responsibility. In my new occupation all these powers and habits were to find abundant exercise ; and the question naturally arises in my mind whether, considering all that lay before me, the course of circumstances by which they had been formed or strengthened was not more fortunate than the training which would have been given by a more premeditated and systematic mode of proceeding, with ample means at command. Had I been more regularly prepared for the profession I was leaving, should I have been equally able to perform what I afterwards accomplished, or indeed equally fitted to make those improvements in school management of which I have already spoken, and which, however trivial some of them may appear in these more advanced days, were at the time decided and even bold innovations ?

Before going on to my proceedings in reference to the South Australian Association, I will, for the sake of convenience, mention two passages which occurred in the midst of them; and here I will take the liberty to remark, that though I had left formal education, I nevertheless bore the general object constantly in mind, and made all my subsequent efforts more or less subservient thereto.

In the year 1834 I took, with others, an active part in proposing that total abolition of the stamp duty on newspapers which was effected about twenty-five years later: and I endeavoured to show, I still think correctly, that this might be done with little or no loss to the revenue. It must be remembered that there was then a heavy duty on advertisements, and my expectation was that the field for advertising would so increase, and thereby so multiply advertisements, as soon to restore the whole fiscal produce of newspapers to its former amount. In estimating the increase to occur in the number of newspapers, I applied a principle on which I subsequently relied in reference to postal reform, viz., that the cheapening of an article in general demand does not as a rule diminish the total public expenditure thereon, the increased consumption making up for the diminished price. Perhaps the actual state of things (1869), though the matter is complicated by the repeal of the advertisement duty, may be regarded as sufficient to show that such expectation was not unreasonable. These views I set forth when I went up in a deputation to the Chancellor of the Exchequer; and the late Lord Monteagle, who then held the office, not only did me the honour to listen with much attention, but requested that he might be supplied with further information on the subject—a request with which I complied as soon as I could collect the necessary materials. The result, as may be remembered, was

not the total abolition, but a reduction of the stamp duty, from about threepence-halfpenny (net) to one penny; an excellent measure in itself, yet but feebly tending to that recuperation for which I looked; since the retention of any duty left a serious obstacle to the multiplication of journals; a fact abundantly shown *e converso* by subsequent events. My argument on the subject will be found in full in the 'Companion to the Newspaper' for June 1st, 1834; where also, I may observe, may be seen the first suggestion of stamped covers, though not in relation to letters. The suggestion came from the Editor, Mr. Charles Knight, and was indeed in some sort indispensable to the plan of total abolition, since the unstamped newspapers would not be transmissible by post without payment; and this, if made in money, would seriously add to the trouble of transmission. Of course, adhesive stamps were as yet undreamt of.

In looking over the paper referred to, I find that, at the time when I drew it up, London was the only town in Great Britain which produced a daily newspaper; that there were but six other towns with papers issued oftener than once per week; only two of the six being in England, viz., Liverpool and Canterbury; so that neither Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, nor Bristol, was of the number. How vastly the motives to acquire the art of reading and the means of indirect instruction have now been increased by the extension and multiplication of journals, appears from the following extract from the *Times* of February 24th, 1868:—

'The Newspaper Press.'

'At the commencement of this year there were 1,404 journals published, viz., 1,084 in England, 49 in Wales, 132 in Scotland, 124 in Ireland, and 15 in the British Isles. * * * There are now 84 daily papers pub-

lished in the United Kingdom, viz., in England, 59 ; in Wales, 1 ; in Scotland, 11 ; in Ireland, 13 ; and in the British Isles, 1.'

The other passage referred to is my addressing a letter to Lord Brougham, in April, 1834, on the subject of pauper education. The bill subsequently called the New Poor Law was then in progress through parliament, and the intended changes seemed to me to afford an opportunity, not to be neglected, for improving the education of pauper children, then for the most part in a wretched state, the schoolmasters being very frequently themselves paupers. To suggest this improvement was the object of my letter.

I pointed out that the union of parishes, combined with the proposed classification of paupers (a design unfortunately but very imperfectly realised), would bring together large numbers of pauper children, and thus facilitate their education. By reference to the report of the Commissioners, I showed that children educated in workhouses became for the most part paupers for life ; while in the few parishes where good education had already been established, few remained chargeable beyond the age of childhood ; that by making good education general, one great source of pauperism would be stopped ; and that even as regarded immediate benefit, if industrial occupation were introduced into the schools, the expense of maintaining the children would be partly defrayed by the results of their labour, while such occupation instead of retarding would even promote their intellectual progress. After urging some further considerations, I concluded by offering any assistance that I could give in forming a complete plan. Perhaps amidst Lord Brougham's multitudinous duties he had no attention to spare for the proposal ; perhaps the difficulty with which the actual changes were made, and the outcry long maintained against

them, may have indisposed Government to any further innovation. But whatever may be the explanation, I cannot avoid speculating on the amount of the benefit which might by this time have resulted from the suggestion, had it been adopted and efficiently worked. How much pauperism and how much crime might have been prevented! We all know that some improvement in workhouse education has been made, but alas! how much less than it is easy to conceive of, and even to believe practicable.

To return now to the subject of South Australian Colonisation. The main principles on which it was intended to proceed were, first, that the colony should from its very establishment be self-supporting (a condition hitherto unheard of); secondly, that means should be taken to keep the colonists from that dispersion which had so often produced grievous suffering and a fearful mortality; thirdly, that no convicts should be admitted into the colony; fourthly, that means should be taken for the immigration of a sufficient number of free labourers; and, lastly, that in the selection of these the numbers of the sexes should be kept equal. It is only necessary to add that, with a view to discourage dispersion and to supply an emigration fund, the price of land was to be fixed comparatively high, probably at one pound per acre. All these provisions will be found embodied in the Act of Parliament eventually passed on the subject (4th and 5th William IV., chap. 95).

As I found Mr. Wakefield's report relative to the high character of the association fully supported by the facts, I joined it with great satisfaction.

Hoping to avoid the expense, difficulties, uncertainty, and delay of an application to parliament, the association applied to the Colonial Secretary for a charter; which, however, was refused, partly on

the alleged ground of want of precedent—an allegation which surprised us not a little. However, as there was no remedy, we took the necessary measures for carrying a bill through parliament; and here our unpleasant expectations were soon confirmed. Indeed the obstacles were so many, that earnest and able as were those who undertook the management of the bill, viz., Colonel Torrens, its mover; Mr. Woolrich Whitmore, the chairman of the association, and then M.P. for Wolverhampton; Mr. (now Sir William) Hutt, and other gentlemen, all members of the same body, there would have been but small chance of success without some one to take upon him, as it were, the drudgery of the process and to prevent the slightest loss of opportunity. Such aid we were fortunate enough to command in the person of my brother Matthew, who had been elected to the first reformed parliament as member for Hull, and in fine, by the joint efforts of all, the bill was at length carried through the House of Commons. In the Lords, however, new delays occurred, and also some modifications—not altogether regarded as improvements—were made in the bill, which thus had to be returned to the Commons. As it was now near the end of the session, it was thought better to accept the changes than to incur further delay. By great effort the bill was returned to the Lords on the very day of prorogation, and thus was one of the last to receive the royal assent.

Commissioners to put the Act in execution were appointed by the Crown May 5, 1835; the chairman being the late Colonel Torrens, and the present Sir William Hutt and Sir John Lefevre being two of the commissioners. To this body I was appointed secretary. To colonise, without any assistance from Government, an almost unknown wilderness, was a

sufficiently difficult task ; but the difficulties of the commission were increased by certain stipulations which Government, doubtless a little uneasy at the novel project of independent colonisation, had thought proper to impose. One of these was the preliminary investment in Government securities of the sum of 55,000*l.* ; 35,000*l.* to be produced by sale of land, and the remaining 20,000*l.* to be raised on the security both of further sales and of the colonial revenue ; the investment in full to precede the exercise of any of the general powers and authorities under the Act. As no surveys had yet been made, the province indeed being very little known, and as even the site of the capital could not yet be fixed on, compliance with such requirements was obviously difficult, and the difficulty was increased by the want of funds with which to pay preliminary expenses ; but by great effort the necessary means were secured before the close of November in the same year.* And here, in justice, it must be mentioned that in the great work of founding the colony, the Commissioners were materially assisted by the formation of the South Australian Company, due mainly to the exertions of Mr. G. F. Angas.

Under all circumstances, however, the early surveying of the land was very important ; while, at the same time, economy restricted the choice of surveyors mainly to those embarking in the enterprise on other grounds. The selection having been made, however, and the staff sent out, we hoped for the best ; but disappointment followed, the survey making slow progress, and demands coming home for such an increase of force as in that early stage would have swamped the whole enterprise, but which, fortunately, my previous practice in surveying enabled me suc-

* See ' First Annual Report of the Colonisation Commissioners for South Australia,' pp. 7 and 13, and ' Fourth Report,' p. 3.

cessfully to oppose, my views being confirmed by Captain Dawson, R.E., Assistant Tithe Commissioner, and Colonel Colby, head of the Ordnance Survey, before whom they were laid; but it was not until a new chief surveyor had been sent out, in the person of Lieutenant (now General) Frome, R.E., and a new governor with ampler powers than his predecessor, that matters were at length put right.*

The payments to ship-owners and ship-surgeons were regulated by the number of emigrants conveyed; but as the occurrence of births and deaths produced considerable variation during the voyage, it became important to determine at what period the number should be ascertained. I advised that this should be done, not, as was customary, at the beginning of the voyage, but at its close, so as to supply a strong motive to the maintenance of the general health aboard ship. This plan being adopted, answered so well, that the number that arrived in the colony often exceeded that recorded at departure; the births on board having outnumbered the deaths. Not thinking it well, however, to trust entirely to this arrangement, I took, under authority of the Commissioners, every care to have both ship and provisions effectually surveyed. On both points a controversy frequently occurred which it may be well to mention. I always took care that the requirements authorised by the commissioners should be emphatically urged on the attention of the contractors, and constantly received assurance that they were fully understood, and should be fully acted upon; but when defects and blemishes were brought to light by the accuracy of the survey, and the stipulated consequences enforced, an outcry arose as if the connection between promise and performance were an unheard-of and most unwarrantable

* 'Third and Fourth Reports of the South Australian Commissioners.'

innovation. After a time, however, as our practice became recognised, evasive attempts grew rare, the first expense being found to be the least.

Another difficulty arose from unpunctuality in time of sailing, the ships chartered to convey emigrants being too often unprepared when the appointed day arrived. The first means adopted to obtain punctuality was to stipulate for fines in case of delay; but the artificial nature of this arrangement rendered its maintenance difficult. Excuses were tendered, often plausible, sometimes substantial, so that their rejection was hard, while at the same time, whether the penalty were enforced or remitted, the passengers by the particular ship suffered all the inconvenience of delay. To remedy these evils, the rule now established was, that whenever the day for sailing arrived, whether the vessel were ready or not, the expense of boarding and maintaining the emigrants was to be borne by the ship-owners. This gave such a motive to punctuality, that delay became infrequent, while, at the worst, detained passengers were relieved from all loss save that of time. I may add that the combined effect of our precautions was that no emigrant ship was lost, nor even sustained any serious accident.

Yet further to expedite the despatch of emigrants, I procured one additional arrangement. At this early period the sailing of chartered ships being but monthly, the interval was inconveniently long; so that persons who had made up their minds to emigrate were often kept for two or three weeks in that unsettled state which inevitably precedes a great removal. To furnish intermediate opportunity, I induced the Commissioners to give notice to ship-owners, that if they were willing to submit to the conditions imposed on vessels chartered by the commissioners, survey of course inclusive, at the same

time undertaking the conveyance at the lowest rate yet tendered and accepted, any unappropriated space should be occupied, in whole or in part, by such emigrants as might be on hand. By this means, not only the primary end was attained, and that always at the lowest rate, but also frequent intermediate conveyance was found for letters and despatches—a convenience the advantage of which may be inferred from what has already been narrated.

In short, the whole scheme—in which, however, I must admit that my share was but subordinate—worked so well, that in the year 1839 the last of my connection with the colony, emigration was proceeding so satisfactorily, though this was only the fourth year of the despatch of settlers, the sales of land produced as much as 170,000*l.*, the number of chartered ships being thirty-eight, and that of emigrants upwards of five thousand.

Subsequently, indeed, difficulties arose, serious indications of which had appeared before I ceased to be secretary. The expenditure in the colony, notwithstanding every precaution taken at home, had begun to exceed the authorised estimates, and this eventually compelled the Commissioners to seek aid from the Government; the consequence being that the management of the colony was in effect transferred to the Colonial Office. The debt, however, then contracted was, I believe, subsequently discharged, and if so, the colony may fairly be said to have been from the first self-supporting, being certainly the first, and perhaps the only, colony that could claim that honour.

I cannot leave the subject of the colony without a glance at its present state. I still receive month by month a copy of its principal journal, the *South Australian Register*, a daily newspaper which, in its monthly form, at least, is nearly as large as the *Times* with its supplement. From this source I

learn that the colony, though unfavoured by any important discovery of gold in its territory, though even checked in its increase by a large emigration thence to the neighbouring colonies, where gold is abundant, contains at present, while yet little more than thirty years old, a population of more than one hundred and seventy thousand; that the land sales yield to the Government an average annual amount of 330,000*l.*; that, including this amount, the annual revenue is as high as the annual expenditure, being 2,700,000*l.*, and the annual exports during the same period above 3,000,000*l.* I may add that at this time of writing (1867) considerable quantities of South Australian wheat, of superior quality, are on the way to England.

As regards the political system of the colony, I shall only mention that when the Commissioners, in their Third Annual Report, recommended Government to grant it municipal institutions, the recommendation included at my suggestion the plan* which I have already spoken of as devised by my father many years before, and recently more known to the world in connection with the name of Mr. Hare. This plan was adopted at the time, though abandoned at a later period, when parliamentary government was introduced into the colonies generally.

As this secretaryship was my first public employment, and as the estimation in which I was held at its close was important, if not essential to my subsequent course, I may, perhaps, be pardoned if I give here the letter in which my resignation was acknowledged, and my services referred to. I have only to add that, heavy as were my duties during the four years of my secretaryship, and the year or two that preceded my formal appointment to that post, I was also engaged, throughout the whole

* 'Third Report,' p. 18.

period, at one or other of two arduous undertakings. Of the former I shall speak presently; the latter was Postal reform; my facts being collected, my plan devised, my pamphlet written, and my case established before a parliamentary committee, more than a year before I left my post.

South Australian Colonisation Office,
Adelphi Terrace, September 27, 1839.

SIR,

The Colonisation Commissioners for South Australia beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 16th instant, tendering your resignation as Secretary to their Board; an appointment in the Treasury having been conferred upon you by Her Majesty's Government.

In communicating their acceptance of your resignation, and in conveying to you their thanks for the zeal, energy, and talent which you have uniformly displayed in the discharge of your duties as Secretary, the Commissioners cannot forego the satisfaction of recording their high appreciation of your successful exertions, in systematising the general business of the Commission, and in devising, framing, and carrying into effect the arduous and complicated arrangements of the Department of Emigration.

Though sensible of the loss they have suffered in being deprived of that combination of theoretical and practical ability which you have manifested in conducting their business, yet the Commissioners, while expressing their individual regret, cannot withhold from you their sincere congratulations upon the advancement you have obtained through the important service which you have rendered to the public.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

ROBERT TORRENS,

Chairman of the Commission.

ROWLAND HILL, Esq.
&c. &c. &c.

The former of my two interludes—if I may so style a piece of downright hard work—was an improvement of the printing machine, which I took in hand when it yet seemed doubtful whether the South Australian

enterprise would yield me an income. My attention to the subject of printing, I may here observe, arose from my connection with the Useful Knowledge Society, then so actively engaged in promoting and cheapening popular literature.

Every one knows that about twenty years before this period the process of printing, at least in the largest offices, had been almost revolutionised by the admirable machine invented in great part by the late Mr. Edward Cowper, afterwards Professor Cowper of King's College, London; with whom, I may add, I became acquainted about this time, and whom to know was to regard and esteem. At the time when I turned my thoughts earnestly to the subject, the machines then in use (for by this time great improvements had been made in the original invention, partly by Mr. Cowper himself, partly by others, particularly by Mr. Applegath), could throw off in the hour, instead of the two hundred and fifty single impressions, to which the Stanhope press, the best in previous use, was limited, eight hundred sheets thoroughly well printed on both sides, or four thousand of such quality as was admissible in newspapers, printed on one side.

Meantime, however, an important improvement had been made in the manufacture of paper, viz., that of Fourdrinier; and it occurred to me that advantage might be taken of this to construct a printing machine capable of working at much higher speed. By Fourdrinier's machine, as is well-known, paper is produced, not in single sheets, as by the former mode, but in long scrolls capable, I believe, of almost indefinite extension; and I perceived that by their use, one, and probably the only insuperable obstacle to a rotatory machine, was removed. I perceived, also, that such machine would have a double advantage; its greater speed being produced by a far smaller expenditure of power.

The difficulties to be surmounted, however, were neither small nor few. The plan implied the necessity of attaching the types to a roller; which, again, involved a change in their form, and also devices to keep them firmly in place against the combined power of gravity and what is called, or rather miscalled, centrifugal force. Another difficulty regarded the supply and proper distribution of the ink, for which no interval could be left, as the process of printing off was to be absolutely continuous. As my invention was not practically adopted and has been in a great measure superseded by later improvements, I forbear details, referring the curious either to my specification, which is dated August 12th, 1835, and numbered 6762; a printed copy of which may be procured at the Patent Office, or to the 'Repertory of Patent Inventions,' No. 35, where the machine is accurately and lucidly described.

It is but just to record, that in giving my invention a practical shape, I was constantly and ably assisted by my brother Edwin, who, I may here add, afterwards became known as the originator of the machine for folding envelopes, which attracted so much attention at the Great Exhibition of 1851. Many of the minor parts, essential however to the efficient working of our printing machine, were of his device and construction, and in my necessary absence the work proceeded under his superintendence.

At length, as is already implied, the machine was completed, and the patent secured. Its operation was repeatedly shown to members of the trade and others interested in the matter; the work produced, though at high speed, being pronounced beautiful, and that which is technically called the register accurate perhaps beyond parallel, while its action was so rapid that even when worked by hand it threw off double impressions of the size of the *Globe* news-

paper at the rate of eight thousand per hour, or nearly tenfold the number produced at the same time by the reciprocating machine : nay more, during this very process, it could concurrently throw off eight thousand single impressions from each of its two rollers; thus making up thirty-two thousand single impressions in all.

It remains to be explained why the invention never came into general use. The explanation is twofold : first, intrinsic difficulties ; second, external circumstances. Of the former it may suffice to say here that they have been removed by subsequent improvements in the process of stereotyping, and of the latter, that the chief obstacle, a fiscal one, relative to newspaper stamps, was afterwards removed, though too late for our purpose, by advancing liberality at the Stamp Office ; and it is a little curious that it was my brother Edwin who, in the capacity of superintendent of the printing of stamps, had the pleasure to make the arrangements necessary for giving the facilities now enjoyed.

It was about this time that I began to entertain distinct hopes, however slight as yet their foundation, of employment in relation to postal affairs ; and as usual in cases of great difficulty, I consulted my father and my brothers on the subject of future proceedings. I represented that I found myself unable at once to continue my duties in relation to the Australian Commission, and, at the same time, both to take effectual means for establishing the success of the printing machine, and to labour efficiently at my project for postal reform. Here was grave matter for consideration, the invention having already cost a large amount of labour, spread over a whole year, from both my brother and myself, besides 2,000*l.* in hard cash ; while, on the other hand, postal prospects, in which every one

present took a deep interest, all having indeed already laboured with me in the cause, were regarded as promising. It was inquired whether my brother, who had thus far assisted me in the printing machine, could not himself carry the matter to completion; but unhappily his health was at that time in too depressed a state to leave any hope that he could alone surmount obstacles so formidable; and here I may remark that, at one time or other, every member of our family has fallen, at least once in his life, through excessive labour and anxiety, into severe, protracted, and even dangerous illness—illness involving consequences which nothing but our unshaken union could have enabled us to support. After long and careful consideration, they concurred in advising that the Post Office should be preferred to the printing machine; and as this recommendation seconded my own opinion, I decided to act upon it.

Before leaving the subject of the printing machine, I may observe that as the patent expired long ago, the plan is now public property; and I cannot but think that a machine constructed upon it would have some important advantages over the best now in use; the more so as for reasons already implied no change in the types would now be needful. I might have less reliance on this opinion, had it not lately been confirmed by an eminent machinist, himself fully conversant with the whole subject.*

I have only to say, in conclusion, that a printer of the highest standing in his trade, induced, I suppose, partly by what I had done in this matter, partly by a general knowledge of my antecedents, offered me

* By an interesting article from the pen of Mr. Smiles, in Macmillan's Magazine for December, 1869, it appears that the machine now in use at the *Times* office is, with whatever modifications, essentially on the principle of my invention.

in 1839 a very advantageous partnership, which I should certainly have accepted, but that it would have involved my refusal of the offer which Government had just then made me, viz., of a post in the Treasury for the prosecution of my plan of postal reform.

HISTORY OF PENNY POSTAGE.

CHAPTER I.

CONCEPTION. CHIEFLY 1836.

AMONGST the many subjects which casually attracted the attention of our family, the operations of the Post Office naturally took their turn. My father spoke at times of Palmer's great improvement,* which he well remembered, and mentioned its beneficial results. Postal considerations, moreover, came upon us in a very practical form; every day that brought post-letters brought also a demand for payment, the post-man waiting at the door till he had received his money. In the very early period, when we were most straitened, his rap was not always welcome; demand being certain and sometimes inconvenient; recompense, in the way of news, doubtful. Tradesmen's circulars, in particular, which sometimes came from a considerable distance—especially from London—and always unpaid, were great causes of disappointment and irritation. Happily they were but rare in those days, or the evil would have been intolerable. How far they may have answered the purpose of their senders, generally speaking, I cannot tell; but with us, the displeasure produced

* The employment of existing stage-coaches instead of slow and irregular horse and foot posts, a change made in the year 1784.

removed all chance of beneficial result. More than once, when the charge was unusually high, we declared our intention of suing for repayment; though I cannot find that this magnanimous resolution ever led us to encounter the necessary trouble and expense of the process.

As much more than half the present generation have no experience of any other system than that of penny postage, it must be difficult, if not impracticable, to revive an adequate conception of the state of things at the time referred to, of the height and variety of the rates charged, and of the multitudinous shifts resorted to for their evasion. The law gave the Post Office a monopoly, and respect for the law is considered characteristic of our countrymen; but, to the best of my memory, I never knew of any one being withheld from its breach on this point, save by considerations either of convenience or of prudence.

The following facts are given by way of example: If, when residing at Birmingham, we received a letter from London, the lowest charge was ninepence, while the slightest enclosure raised it to eighteenpence, and a second enclosure to two shillings and threepence, though the whole missive might not weigh a quarter of an ounce. We had relatives at Haddington; the lowest rate thence was thirteenpence-halfpenny; others at Shrewsbury, but the postage thence I do not remember, as we never used the Post Office in our correspondence with them, since a tradesman in our town who had occasion to send and in turn to receive a weekly packet, was kind enough to enclose our letters; we carrying them more than half a mile to place them in his hands, while the return letters, being dropped by him into the Birmingham Post Office, came to us charged with merely the local rate of one penny. In looking over letters of the period antecedent to the Post Office reform, I find constant

reference to expedients for saving postage; thus, in writing to a friend at a particular town, we would trouble him to call upon such and such others to communicate intelligence, or to make inquiries, the result to be reported in his next letter; sometimes, even, we would ask him to call upon tradesmen to give orders, or to urge despatch in commissions previously given. If a friend were about to make a journey to a town where we had connections, we did not hesitate to place letters in his hands, regardless alike of his trouble and the chance of his forgetfulness; being ourselves, of course, ready in turn to perform the like service, though, of course, at the like risk. In the year 1823, taking a holiday excursion through the lake district to Scotland, and wishing to keep my family informed as to my movements and my health (then in a depressed state), I carried with me a number of old newspapers, and in franking these, according to the useless form then required, while I left the post-mark with its date to show the place, I indicated my state of health by selecting names according to previous arrangement; the more Liberal members being taken to indicate advancement, while Tories were to show retrogression, “Sir Francis Burdett” was to imply vigorous health, while probably “Lord Eldon” would have almost brought one of my brothers after me in anxiety and alarm.* In later days, more so after our removal to the neighbourhood of London, and most of all while my brother Matthew was in Parliament—viz., from 1832 to 1834—we sometimes procured franks, particularly when for any reason we had unusual regard to appearances; but as at this time we were in easier circumstances, we felt some com-

* In ‘Post Office Reform’ this anecdote is given as of a friend, but in truth I was my own hero. It must not be supposed that in franking these newspapers I was usurping a privilege. Incredible as it may now appear, while the frank was required, any one was, in effect, at liberty to give it.

punction in using franks for general purposes, thinking it questionable to evade an impost by means from the use of which, as we well knew by earlier experience, those lower down were utterly debarred. This feeling became stronger as we gradually learnt the monstrous abuses which had grown up in connection with the franking system; when we found, for instance, that though a member's frank would cover but an ounce, there were franks of another kind which served for unlimited weight, and were said to have been actually used to free a greatcoat, a bundle of baby-linen, and a pianoforte.

Even in our early days, however, necessity being the mother of conception as well as of invention, my father, while testifying great admiration for the postal system generally, had repeatedly expressed the opinion that, even for fiscal purposes, postage was unwisely high, an opinion which in all probability tended to draw my attention to postal affairs. Be this as it may, the earliest record on the subject that I can find in my own memoranda, and which is dated August, 1826 (that is, ten years before the publication of my pamphlet), gives my first conception of a travelling post office. It is as follows:—

‘The mails reach London at six in the morning, and the distribution of letters does not commence till after nine. Might not the mails arrive three hours later, and consequently leave the respective towns three hours later, if the letters could be assorted and marked on the road? And might not this be done by the guard, if he had the inside fitted up with shelves, &c., for the purpose? The charge for postage might be marked with a stamp; as each bag was received, all the London letters it contained would require the same stamp-mark, except in cases of double and treble letters, when the mark might be repeated. If, from any defects in the address, the guard should not be able to assign any letter to its proper district, he might put it by for assortment at the General Post Office, to be delivered the next

day. . . . An additional body might be added to the coach for inside passengers, or, the load being less, two of the horses might perhaps be spared, which would enable the speed to be increased (as with a proportionate load two will go quicker than four horses), and would save time in changing them.'

At a yet earlier date than this, however, though how many years before I do not know, I had given some little thought to the subject of more rapid locomotion; having mainly in view, I believe, the speedier conveyance of the mail. I had considered, as well as some others, the question of propulsion by steam, being of course entirely unaware of the great invention then progressing in the mind of George Stephenson; and, indeed, having no notion that the laying of a railway would be a necessary preliminary. Steam, however, I soon abandoned for a more potent as well as more portable agent, viz., gunpowder; and with this I made some experiments; but these proving unsatisfactory, I carried my researches no further, and so escaped, perhaps, a serious explosion.

My next memorandum bears date January 11th, 1830, and suggests the feasibility of conveying the mails through tubes by atmospheric means; but this, also, remained a crude and unpublished conception.

I have already mentioned that our opinion was from first to last, and without reserve or exception, in favour of free trade. Such being our views, we had welcomed with joy the gradual relaxation of the protective system, which, commencing under Mr. Huskisson, never absolutely stopped until protection was no more. We had remarked, with satisfaction, that the lowering of the tariff had not produced a corresponding reduction in the public revenue; and indulged in sanguine hopes that, even where reduction appeared in a particular department, it either would be temporary or would be made up in some other.

The year 1835 having brought a large surplus in the general revenue, we naturally speculated as to its specific result in reduction of duties; and it was then that my thoughts first turned earnestly to the Post Office.

I now examined more specifically the result of the late financial reforms; and I found (as subsequently stated in my pamphlet*) that in the reductions hitherto made, the relation between the relief to the public and the loss to the revenue had varied greatly; so that while in the instance of leather and soap the reduction of one half of the duty had eventually caused to the revenue a loss of one third, in that of coffee the same reduction had actually produced a gain of one half; and this brought me to the conclusion that, "when a reduction of taxation is about to take place it is exceedingly important that great care and judgment should be exercised in the selection of the tax to be reduced, in order that the maximum of relief may be afforded to the public with the minimum of injury to the revenue."†

My next attempt was to arrive at some rule which might serve for general guidance in such cases; and I came to the conclusion that, with some allowance for exception, the best test would be found by examining each tax "as to whether its productiveness has kept pace with the increasing number and prosperity of the nation. And the tax which proves most defective under this test is in all probability the one we are now in quest of."‡

This test brought the tax I had in mind, viz., that on the transmission of letters, into bad pre-eminence; since, during the previous twenty years, viz., from 1815 to 1835 (my investigations being made in 1836), the

* 'Post Office Reform; its Importance and Practicability.' By Rowland Hill. Published by Charles Knight and Co., London. 1837.

† 'Post Office Reform, second edition, p. 2.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 3.

absolute revenue derived from the Post Office, whether gross or net, instead of increasing, had even somewhat diminished ; whereas, if it had merely kept pace with the growth of population, to say nothing of the concurrent spread of education, extension of trade, and advancement in prosperity, the revenue—I mean the net revenue—would have increased by no less than 500,000*l*.*

To try the matter further, I looked out for some other tax, which, while less exorbitant, was in other respects liable to as nearly as possible the same influences, and I naturally took the duty on stage-coaches. I found that this, instead of diminishing, like that in question, had more than doubled in the same period ; increasing from less than 218,000*l*. to nearly 500,000*l*., or about one hundred and twenty-eight per cent. I found, again, that if the Post Office revenue had risen in like proportion (and it seemed scarcely to be doubted that the demand for the conveyance of letters had increased in the same ratio as that for the conveyance of persons and parcels), the increase of net revenue would have been no less than 2,000,000*l*.†

The general fairness of this conclusion was afterwards shown by the fact ; 116 per cent. having been the ratio of increase in the net revenue of the Post Office during the twenty years between 1847 and 1867.

For yet further comparison, I turned to the accounts of Post Office revenue in France, where the rates of postage were less exorbitant than with us, and taking the gross revenue (the net revenue not being given), I found that this had risen from somewhat less than 1,000,000*l*. in 1821 to nearly 1,500,000*l*. in 1835, about fifty-four per cent. in fourteen years.‡

Nor was I proceeding without authority in thus condemning the existing postal rates as unsound in

* ‘Post Office Reform,’ second edition, p. 3.

† p. 4.

‡ p. 5.

policy, Sir Henry Parnell having attributed the non-increase of the revenue to the high duty charged on letters, and Mr. McCulloch having not only taken the same general view, but specifically explained the loss by reference to the illicit conveyance of letters, for which the increased number of coaches gave so much facility.* Of the important services of Mr. Wallace on the same point I shall speak hereafter.

While thus confirmed in my belief that even in a financial point of view the postal rates were injuriously high, I also became more and more convinced, the more I considered the question, that the fiscal loss was not the most serious injury thus inflicted on the public; that yet more serious evil resulted from the obstruction thus raised to the religious, moral, and intellectual progress of the people; and that the Post Office, if put on a sound footing, would assume the new and important character of a powerful engine of civilisation; that though now rendered feeble and inefficient by erroneous financial arrangements, it was capable of performing a distinguished part in the great work of national education.

I became also more alive to the consideration that the duty of rendering its operation as beneficial as possible, incumbent as this must be on any institution, became doubly so on the Post Office, from its character as a monopoly; that, as it forbade all others to perform its functions, it was bound to render its own performance as complete as possible.† Of this view I found strong confirmation in the recent report of a Government Commission.‡

Being thus fully convinced that the present arrangements were wrong, I had next to inquire as to the changes most efficient for redress. As I had never yet been within the walls of any Post Office

* 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, pp. 5, 6. † p. 9.

‡ 'Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Enquiry,' p. 4.

(an advantage which was, indeed, reserved for me until after the adoption of my plan), my only sources of information for the time consisted in those heavy blue books, in which invaluable matter too often lies hidden amidst heaps of rubbish. Into some of these, as previously implied, I had already dipped; but Mr. Wallace having supplied me by post with an additional half hundred weight of raw material, I now commenced that systematic study, analysis, and comparison, which the difficulty of my self-imposed task rendered necessary.

I started however with the simple notion that rates must be reduced,—but soon came to the conclusion that such reduction might be carried to a considerable extent not only without loss to the revenue, but with positive benefit; that a larger reduction might be made without loss, and a still larger without drawing upon the surplus beyond a reasonable extent.* The question to be decided therefore was, how far the total reduction might safely be carried; and this involved two preliminary inquiries; first, what would be the probable increase of correspondence consequent upon such or such reduction; secondly, what would be the augmentation of expense consequent upon such increase.

Investigation upon this latter head brought out three important facts. The first was that one great source of expense was to be found in what is technically called “taxing” the letters, that is, ascertaining and marking the postage to be charged on each; the second, that great expense likewise arose from complicated accounts, post-masters having to be debited with unpaid postage on letters transmitted to their offices, and credited with their payments made in return; while they again had to receive and check the payments of the letter carriers, who, it must be

* ‘Post Office Reform,’ second edition, p. 10.

remembered, received, at that time, from the public, almost all the postage paid; the third, that the cost of delivering letters, great as it inevitably was, was much augmented—indeed, save in rural districts, more than doubled—by being saddled with the collection of postage.

It further appeared that these expenses must increase in something like direct proportion to increase in the number of letters.

These conclusions led me to perceive that for the effectual reduction of expense it was necessary to obtain simplicity of operation, and therefore to reduce the prodigious variety of rates (then extending on single inland letters alone to upwards of forty), and further, to adopt means to induce prepayment, so as to save the time at once of the letter carriers, of the clerks with whom they had to account for postage received, of the provincial post-masters, and, lastly, at the central office.

In considering how far the variety of rates might be reduced, I was naturally led to inquire what proportion of postal expense proceeded from the conveyance of letters between town and town, and further, how far such expense, whatever it might be, varied in relation to distance. On pursuing this inquiry, I arrived at results so startling that nothing but the most careful verification could satisfy me of their accuracy. I first perceived that the expense of such conveyance, which one would naturally suppose to be very great, was in fact, when divided by the number of missives, very small.

Having, according to the best information then accessible, estimated the number of letters and newspapers annually passing through the Post Office at 126,000,000, I calculated the apparent cost of what I termed the primary distribution, viz., the receipt, conveyance and distribution of missives passing from post

town to post town, and found that this cost, on all such letters, newspapers, &c., within the United Kingdom, was, on the average, only 84-hundredths of a penny each; and that of this sum only one-third, or 28-hundredths of a penny, went to conveyance; the remaining two-thirds, or 56-hundredths of a penny, appertaining to the receipt and delivery of letters, the collection of postage, &c. I further remarked that as the cost of conveyance for a given distance is, under ordinary circumstances, in tolerably direct proportion to the weight carried, and as a newspaper or franked letter (and franked letters were then very numerous) weighs generally as much as several ordinary letters, the average expense of conveying a letter chargeable with postage must be much lower yet; probably about one-third of the sum mentioned above, or in other words nine-hundredths of a penny; a conclusion pretty well supported by the acknowledged fact that the chargeable letters did not weigh more than about one-fourth of the whole mail.*

Beyond this, I found, by another calculation, based on more exact data, that the cost of transit as regards the great mass of letters, small as it appeared to be, was in reality still smaller; being probably loaded with charges not strictly appertaining to it, and certainly enhanced by the carriage of the mail to places which were "not of sufficient importance to repay the expense."†

Having found, with tolerable accuracy, the total cost of conveying the mail from London to Edinburgh;‡ having in like manner estimated the weight

* 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 16.

† Ibid.

‡ When at length I obtained precise information, I found that in taking care not to make my estimate too low I had made it considerably too high; and I think the history of this rectification too curious and characteristic to be omitted. Two years later, the Parliamentary Committee appointed to consider my plan ordered, at my suggestion, a return on the subject; when, to my surprise and amusement, the report of the Post Office gave as

of the mail so conveyed, and from these premises deduced the cost per letter, I found this to be no more than one thirty-sixth part of a penny, though the distance, four hundred miles, is far above the average.*

Thus, then, I found, first, that the cost of conveying a letter between post town and post town was exceedingly small; secondly, that it had but little relation to distance; and thirdly, that it depended much upon the number of letters conveyed by the particular mail; and as the cost per letter would diminish with every increase in such number, and as such increase would certainly follow reduction of postage, it followed that, if a great reduction could be effected, the cost of conveyance per letter, already so small, might be deemed absolutely insignificant.

Hence, then, I came to the important conclusion that the existing practice of regulating the amount of postage by the distance over which an inland letter was conveyed, however plausible in appearance, had no foundation in principle; and that consequently the rates of postage should be irrespective of distance. I scarcely need add that this discovery, as startling to myself as it could be to any one else, was the basis of the plan which has made so great a change in postal affairs.

New prospects having thus opened upon me, I was next led to consider two further questions, both im-

the cost of this mail the exact sum estimated by me, viz., 5*l*. Struck with the coincidence, the more so as I had intentionally allowed for possible omission, I suggested the call for a return in detail; and, this being given, brought down the cost to £4 8*s*. 7³/₄*d*. In the return, however, I discovered an error, viz., that the charge for guards' wages was that for the double journey instead of the single; and when this point was adjusted, in a third return, the cost sank to £3 19*s*. 7³/₄*d*. When explanation of the anomaly was asked for, it was acknowledged by the Post Office authorities that my estimate had been adopted wholesale.—*Appendix to Second Report of Select Committee on Postage, 1838, pp. 257-259.*

* 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 18.

portant to that simplicity of arrangement of which I was in quest.

First, was it possible that the existing variable charge should be exchanged for a single uniform rate?

Second, was it practicable to require prepayment?

No great sagacity was needful to perceive how vast would be the convenience to the public, and the economy of labour to the Post Office, if either of these points could be secured, and how prodigious the gain from attaining both.

As regards the first, it was clear that as the expenses of the receipt and delivery were the same for all letters, while the cost of conveyance, already so small, seemed reducible to absolute insignificance, a uniform rate would approach nearer to absolute justice than any other rate that could be fixed.

It further appeared that as lowness of rate was essential to uniformity (since no serious elevation of the lowest existing rates would be tolerated, and the same lowness was the only condition on which prepayment could be successfully required) every reduction of working expenses, however obtained, would itself, by facilitating decrease of rate, become a means of attaining the simplicity indispensable to my plan.

Seeing that there would be great difficulty in establishing any uniform rate higher than the minimum then in use, viz., one penny, I was of course led to consider whether the uniform rate could be fixed as low as that small sum; or, in other words, what loss of net revenue would be involved in the adoption of a penny rate, and lastly, whether such loss were admissible for the sake of the great advantages to be thereby secured.

Again, however, perceiving that though simple distance did not justify increase of rate, yet such

increase might be required by remoteness from the great highways of traffic, I thought that probably general uniformity might be more easily secured by sacrificing universality; and hence arose my conception, now doubtless generally forgotten, of a practical distinction between primary and secondary distribution. By primary distribution, I meant "the transmission of letters &c., from post town to post town throughout the United Kingdom, and the delivery within the post towns; and by secondary distribution, that distribution which proceeds from each post town, as a centre, to places of inferior importance;"* my plan being that within the range of primary distribution there should be a uniform rate of one penny, retaining an additional charge for secondary distribution (to be collected on delivery), unless indeed any district so served might choose to take the cost of such distribution upon itself.

Of the equity of such a distinction it is needless to speak, since the difference of charge would have proceeded from a difference in actual expense; of its feasibility it is enough to say that it was to a considerable extent in actual use, the common practice being, on the arrival of a letter at any post town, for delivery beyond a certain range, to charge an additional penny. In one instance at least the existing difference was yet greater, the additional charge in the London district being as high as two-pence. In some towns in each of the three kingdoms the secondary principle was carried so far as to impose a special charge, generally of a penny, on all letters not fetched from the office by the receiver;† a practice continued, I believe, for some time even after the establishment of penny postage. The only remaining question was whether, supposing this distinction to

* 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 12.

† Returns, 1830, Nos. 293 and 478.

be set aside, the advantage of absolute uniformity would compensate for the injustice involved in establishing equality of charge with inequality of expense.

At the same time, wishing to give primary distribution its greatest possible range, and to make the rates even on secondary distribution as low as could fairly be done, I proposed that the whole weight of taxation should be thrown on the primary distribution, which was to include every place which could be reached without absolute loss to the revenue, and that each department of the secondary distribution should just defray its own expenses.*

On this plan I hoped that under economical management every important village would be able to obtain at least one delivery per day, and the importance of such extension will be strikingly manifest when the reader is reminded that at the period in question there were, even in England proper, districts as large as the county of Middlesex in which the postman never set foot.

Upon looking back to this question as it then stood, I am inclined to think that the early abandonment of this distinction (made for reasons that will appear hereafter) was on several accounts unfortunate; one serious consequence being a great aggravation of the immediate loss to the revenue, but a far more important one its effect in retarding that extension of postal facilities of which I have yet to speak, and which was so important to both public convenience and fiscal recovery. As the additional charge would have repaid the cost of extension, the most ostensible as well as the most valid objection thereto would have been removed; and that development might have been rapid, which was in fact lamentably slow. Doubtless the distinction would have been but

* 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 55.

temporary, save perhaps in those remote places where there is now no delivery at all; elsewhere secondary distribution would have gradually yielded to primary.*

One important circumstance on which I relied for increase in the number of post letters was the extent to which, under the stimulus of high rates, contraband conveyance was carried. Of this I have already made some little mention, but there was a systematic evasion of the law that far outwent anything that could be done by mere private hands. I had learnt, for instance, that the carriers plying between Birmingham and the neighbouring towns, to the distance of twelve or thirteen miles, were in the constant habit of conveying letters, which they delivered at one penny each (justifying so far my proposed reduction); and a highly respectable merchant and manufacturer of that town gave it me as his opinion that the number of letters so distributed very greatly exceeded the number distributed in the same district by the Post Office.† It was, also, well-known that vast numbers were every day forwarded by carriers and coach proprietors. Of course discoveries sometimes occurred, and penalties were levied, but the traffic was so openly carried on that the risk could not have been great—an occasional seizure doing little more than to show the extent of the practice, which indeed was not likely to be suppressed so long as it was sanctioned by the moral sense of the public; in face of which the Post Office itself could not levy its full penalties. Thus, in the year 1833, though one of the fines incurred was as high as 1000*l.*, the highest

* By statistics published in the journal of the Society of Arts (Oct. 28th, 1870), it appears that the plan of secondary distribution (though perhaps not under that name), actually exists in North Germany, concurrently with complete distribution from house to house; and, doubtless, the one arrangement has facilitated and justified the other.

† 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, pp. 34 and 83.

amount actually paid was only 160*l*.* Such a seizure had lately been made, bringing to light in a carrier's warehouse one bag containing no less than 1100 letters.† Independently, however, of positive evidence, it was clear that "the vast extent to which the trade of the country had increased during the previous twenty years" (*viz.*, those immediately following the close of the great war with France and the second war with the United States) "must have been attended by a proportionate increase in the amount of mercantile correspondence, while the spread of education and increase of population during the same period must have greatly augmented the correspondence of all kinds."‡

Now it was easy to foresee (though, as will afterwards appear, the very probability was then not merely questioned but denied) that the proposed reduction to one penny would cause all, or nearly all, this correspondence to pass through the Post Office, which, by its superior organisation and command of means, would render private competition on equal terms altogether futile.

I have already remarked on the encouragement afforded by the increased sale of various articles after the reduction of the duties thereon; but perceiving that such reduction could tend to increased sale only by its effect on price, and that the chief element of price is cost, over which legislation has no control, I was naturally led to expect that here, where the reduction would be directly and fully upon price itself, the consequent increase of custom would be very much greater.§

As a means of giving some indication of the results to be looked for, I took two or three articles, of which, from whatever cause, the price had fallen,

* Parl. Return, 1834, No. 19.

† 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 83. ‡ Ibid. § p. 85.

and observed how far cheapening had been followed by increase in consumption. Thus, the price of soap having fallen by one-eighth, the consumption had increased by one-third; in tea, a reduction of one-sixth had increased consumption by almost a half; in coffee, a gradual reduction of one-fourth (occurring during the previous thirteen years) had been accompanied by an increase in consumption amounting to threefold;—while in cotton goods, a similar reduction of one-half, spread over about twenty years, had been accompanied by a corresponding increase of no less than fourfold.

Thus, it appeared that reduction in price, even if it does not increase the total expenditure on the article affected, seldom, if ever, permanently lowers its amount.*

Hence it followed that even supposing the postage to be reduced to the low rate contemplated, the public would probably continue to expend as much in postage as before; and that thus the gross revenue would be sustained. According to my calculation, this implied an increase in the number of letters posted to the amount of between five and six fold.

Moreover, the soundness of the principle had already stood the test of experiment, though on a small scale, in the Post Office itself; the chief trial having taken place in the London district, and considerable reductions having also been recently made in the postage of foreign letters, all speedily followed by great increase in the amount of receipts thereon. Of loss to revenue following reduction of postage, save as a very temporary consequence, I knew no instance.

In brief, I arrived at the following conclusions:—

First, that the number of letters passing through the post would be greatly increased by the disuse of franks and abandonment of illicit conveyance;

* ‘Post Office Reform,’ second edition, pp. 86, 87.

by the breaking up of one long letter into several shorter ones, by the use of the post for the distribution of circulars and the issue of many circulars hitherto withheld; and, lastly, by an enormous enlargement of the class of letter-writers.

Further, that supposing the public, according to its practice in other cases, only to expend as much in postage as before, the loss to the net revenue would be but small; and again, that such loss, even if large, would be more than compensated by the powerful stimulus given by low postage to the productive power of the country, and the consequent increase of revenue in other departments.

Finally, that while the risk to Post Office revenue was comparatively small and the chance of eventual gain not inconsiderable, and while the beneficial effect on the general revenue was little less than certain, the adoption of my plan would certainly confer a most important, manifest, and acceptable benefit on the country.*

It is now high time to speak of one whose valuable services in the cause of Post Office reform are, I fear, but insufficiently remembered at the present day, but who, nevertheless, was in the field more than two years before I began my investigations, and who, while unconsciously preparing the way for my proceedings, procured, by persevering efforts, some immediate changes of considerable value. This was the late Mr. Wallace, who, having been elected to the first reformed Parliament for the new borough of Greenock, began, in 1833, a course of bold criticism on the proceedings of the Post Office, which, though received at first, perhaps because of some over-earnestness, with unmerited ridicule, gradually succeeded in obtaining attention in Parliament, and even in some degree from the public.

* 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, pp. 94-96.

Up to that time the Post Office, notwithstanding its manifold imperfections, had for a long period, perhaps ever since the adoption of Palmer's great reform, almost always escaped general censure. Nor, indeed, is this surprising; for it must be admitted that, however far it lagged behind the knowledge of the age, it was even then, abstractedly considered, a wonderful machine, conveying missives to and from the most distant places with much more approach to regularity and certainty than any other means had yet afforded; so that it was generally regarded in those days as an admirable mystery, whose apparent vagaries and shortcomings resulted, no doubt, from insuperable difficulties well understood by the initiated, but far beyond the comprehension of the profane vulgar. The merit of breaking down this prestige is due in great measure to Mr. Wallace's exertions; for, though the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry, already referred to, had a short time before with great ability exposed much mismanagement in the Post Office, and recommended various improvements (some of which were afterwards taken up by Mr. Wallace, and some still later by myself), yet these exposures and recommendations, buried as they were in voluminous reports, attracted little attention from the public.

Mr. Wallace, however, not contented with denouncing abuses, proceeded to indicate various remedies; thus, he advised the adoption of weight as a measure of charge, instead of the absurd and roublesome plan then in use, which regulated it mainly by the number of inclosures. Again, he proposed that the contract for the construction of mail-coaches should be thrown open to public competition; a measure which being soon afterwards adopted, effected a saving of more than 17,000*l.* per annum. He also urged the consolidation of the London General and District Post Offices; a measure

which subsequently formed part of the plan of penny postage, though not carried into effect until many years afterwards; and, lastly, he urged the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry into the management of the Post Office; a measure carried out early in 1835—the Commission continuing its labours until 1838, during which period it issued no less than ten reports; its efforts fairly entitling it to the credit of much of the subsequent improvement. During the first year of its operations Mr. Wallace, suspending his efforts in Parliament, more effectually served the cause to which he had devoted himself by assisting in the investigations of the Commission; giving evidence, in the course of which he recommended, amongst others, the following improvements: first, the establishment of day mails—which subsequently formed part of my plan, and was eventually carried into effect, with great advantage to the public and to the revenue; secondly, a reduction in the rates of postage; and, thirdly, more frequent communication between place and place.

In 1836, resuming his labours in Parliament, while urging various other measures, he repeated his recommendation of a reduction in the rates of postage, naming eightpence or ninepence as a maximum (a limitation which, whatever may be thought of it now, would then have been regarded as a great improvement); advised, secondly, the registration of letters (afterwards carried into effect with advantage both to the public and the revenue); and lastly, the abandonment of a rule, so monstrous that its maintenance seems now hardly credible, by which the rate of charge, instead of being regulated by the actual distance between place and place (supposing, which as yet nobody questioned, that distance was the true criterion), was varied according to the length of the course, often circuitous, which the

letter was made to take for the convenience of the Post Office.

It was in this year (1836) that my acquaintance with Mr. Wallace began; but I must now return for a time to my own proceedings, merely observing here, though I shall have occasion to recur to the subject, that any one wishing for a concise, but I believe tolerably complete statement, of Mr. Wallace's services, may refer to the report of a speech, given in the Appendix (B), which I made at Greenock in the year 1850, at a meeting convened for the purpose of originating a national testimonial to Mr. Wallace, for his services in relation to postal reform.

Moreover, the impulse given to the general cause by Mr. Wallace was aided by some of the leading men in each of the two great political parties; the Duke of Richmond, Earl Spencer, and Lord Ashburton in the House of Lords, and Viscount Lowther, Mr. Hume, Mr. Warburton, and many others in the House of Commons, having declared themselves in favour of extensive reforms; while the late Government (Sir Robert Peel's) and its successor (Lord Melbourne's) seemed to have acknowledged the necessity for such change, by appointing a Commission of Inquiry.

Being now prepared with my main facts and conclusions, I had to consider how best to give them effect. The time seemed propitious; the Liberals being in power, the almost superstitious respect for the Post Office being, not indeed shattered, but certainly shaken, and a large surplus being ready to make good the immediate loss likely to follow reduction, as well as to provide for the moderate permanent loss on which I had reckoned, as a proper sacrifice to the public good, in view of the great advantages to be thereby secured. By this time, moreover, I had many friends in Parliament, and even some acquaintance with one or two members of Government; which

encouraged me to hope that my plan would, at least, receive attention; and attention, I was sanguine enough to think, must soon induce adoption.

I set to work, therefore, to give my matter such shape as seemed best fitted to illustrate my facts and give force to my arguments; working with the more confidence because with Mr. Spring Rice, who, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, would have chiefly to consider the question, I had the good fortune to be personally acquainted; he having, many years before, visited our school at Hazelwood, and I, on various subsequent occasions, one of which has already been mentioned, having had further intercourse with him.

In urging the various benefits to be anticipated from cheap and easy postal conveyance, I did not fail to dwell on its aid to education, which was then at length beginning to be regarded as a matter of national interest and national duty, though the movement in its favour was still grievously clogged by sectarian prejudice and political animosities. The following passage will show that I gave it the chief place in my summary:—*

‘Its object is not to increase the political power of this or that party, but to benefit all sects in politics and religion; and all classes from the highest to the lowest. To the rich, as to the less wealthy, it will be acceptable, from the increased facilities it will afford for their correspondence. To the middle classes it will bring relief from oppressive and irritating demands which they pay grudgingly; estimating them even beyond their real amount, because probably of their frequent recurrence—which they avoid by every possible contrivance, and which they would consider quite intolerable if they knew that nearly the whole is a tax. And to the poor it will afford the means of communication with their distant friends and relatives, from which they are at present debarred. It will give increased energy to trade; it will remove innumerable temptations to fraud; and it will

* ‘Post Office Reform,’ second edition, pp. 66, 67.

be an important step in general education ; the more important, perhaps, because it calls on Government for no factitious aid, for nothing in the shape of encouragement, still less of compulsion ; but merely for the removal of an obstacle, created by the law, to that spontaneous education which happily is extending through the country, and which, even the opponents of a national system will agree, ought to be unobstructed in its progress.*

* ‘ Post Office Reform,’ p. 67.

CHAPTER II.

PROMULGATION.

As yet I had proceeded almost alone ; but when I had made a draft of my intended pamphlet, our usual family council was convened, to hear it read and consider its contents. I cannot now recall, even vaguely, the various discussions that ensued, nor the suggestions and modifications to which they gave rise ; but the general result was a hearty approval of the plan, and that ready co-operation in promoting it which never failed me in any need, either before or after. Probably the wording of the draft underwent various changes, but the general tenour remained unaltered ; and when all had been done that our united care could effect, the paper was printed (though of course with the precautionary mark “Private and Confidential”), in order that it might be the more readily perused by those to whom it was to be addressed. With certain exceptions, to be named hereafter, and with some additions to the Appendix, it was substantially and almost literally the same as that subsequently published under the title of ‘Post Office Reform, Second Edition.’

When, however, I placed my paper in the hands of Government (which I did early in January, 1837), it was in the earnest desire that no publication might be necessary. Hoping, with the sanguine expectation of an inventor, that a right understanding of my

plan must secure its adoption, and relying with confidence on the clearness and force of my exposition, I little knew as yet the endless complexities in the machine of Government, the deep-rooted prejudice of routine, or the countless interests ready to start up in alarm at the appearance of innovation.

The first result, however, of my sending in my treatise was encouraging, as I received a summons to wait upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I must add that he received me courteously, that he listened attentively to my representations, and seemed to imply a sort of general approval of my plan, by suggesting some modification in detail, advising the reconsideration of some of its parts, and recommending that in some others the facts and arguments should be given more in detail; and, in conclusion, requesting me to send in a supplement to my paper.

In this document, which I sent in on the 28th of the same month (January), I gave more in detail my reasons for expecting a great increase in the number of letters; adding also confirmatory letters from Mr. Charles Knight, the eminent publisher; Mr. Dillon, of the house of Morrison and Co.; Mr. Thornley, the member for Wolverhampton; and Mr. Porter, of the Board of Trade; all of which subsequently appeared in the second edition of my pamphlet.*

The ounce, which I had taken merely as the lowest rate then recognised in the Post Office, having been objected to as too large for the minimum weight and measure of increase, on the ground that it would allow several letters to be sent under one cover to be afterwards distributed by private hand, I adopted the Chancellor of the Exchequer's suggestion for the substitution of the half-ounce. Perhaps some future

* 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, pp. 88, 89, 92, 93.

reformer may recommend the restoration of the original standard.*

On the other hand, the pound having been objected to as too high a maximum, since its use might excite discontent among coach proprietors and other carriers, who would probably regard it as an interference with their trade, I proposed a reduction to four ounces. At a later period, however, if I may so far anticipate events, when penny postage came to be established, the pound limit was the one adopted, and even this limitation was afterwards withdrawn, so as to leave no restriction in weight save what would arise from augmented charge.

I had also to deal with the question of prepayment, on which difficulties had been raised both in the office and from some quarters without; the former taking alarm lest its establishment, however attained, should greatly diminish the amount of correspondence, and the latter objecting that it would enable the clerks in the Post Office to become possessed of information relative to parties corresponding which might be used for the commercial injury of one or other, and also pointing out that servants or others intrusted with money for the payment of postage might be tempted to keep this for their own use, destroying the letters to conceal their dishonesty.

While giving various reasons which it would be now quite superfluous to repeat, for declining to share in the alarm of the Post Office, I suggested, as a means of obviating the other difficulties, the use of stamped covers, a device which, as I have already mentioned, had been originally recommended, not indeed for letters but for newspapers, by Mr. Charles Knight; and I take occasion to remark that the

* Within the last few months (November, 1869) I have privately recommended to Government the contingent adoption of this measure, as well as of others for giving increased facilities and greater speed of conveyance.

mention of this expedient, as applied to letters, occurred for the first time in this supplementary paper. I pointed out at the same time, that to whatever extent the covers might be used, to that extent or nearly so the revenue would be collected in large sums instead of small, a change obviously tending to the simplification of accounts in the department concerned.

I submitted at the same time that mode of gradual introduction of my plan which appeared almost immediately afterwards in the second edition of my pamphlet; and as time would be required for the preliminary arrangements necessarily extending over the whole country, I suggested its experimental application, in the meantime, to the local correspondence of the London District, containing, as I pointed out, one-twelfth part of the whole population of the United Kingdom.

To return to my interview with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I must admit that the hopes with which it began were considerably damped before its close; I was at least made very distinctly aware that Government had by no means made up its mind to the adoption of my plan, and I was left altogether in doubt as to the prospect of such desirable conclusion. This was very disappointing, for I could not but feel that unless the plan were voluntarily taken up by Government, its introduction would have to encounter serious obstacles, and would be attended with grave disadvantages. If the public must be called on to enforce attention on a reluctant Government, even supposing the call to be answered, the plan would have to be adopted in such shape and in such manner as the public voice might demand, little thanks meantime being given for the concession; whereas if Government kept the matter entirely in its own hands it might proceed tentatively, and therefore

safely ; lowering the rates with caution, and meanwhile removing anomalies, increasing facilities, extending operations, and taking all other measures tending to enlarge public convenience, to increase correspondence, and to sustain the revenue ; while every succeeding improvement would come with a grace, and be received with gratitude. To this hour I regret that this course was not taken ; believing that by it much misunderstanding, nay, much animosity, would have been prevented, much trouble saved, facilities more promptly secured, and even the loss of revenue, which in the year following the adoption of my plan compelled a temporary augmentation of other duties, altogether avoided.

Almost as soon as I laid my plan before Government, I took also into council a few trusty friends, and thus had the benefit of various criticisms, and of some suggestions ; while, nevertheless, save where I myself yielded to argument, my own opinion was, in every instance, confirmed by a majority of those consulted.

But of all those I thus consulted there was no one whose reply I awaited with greater anxiety than that of Mr. Wallace, already recognised as the leading Post Office reformer of the day. Would he not treat me as an intruder on his domain, a poacher on his manor ? Would he not at best give me but a cold approval, keeping his heart all the while for his own device ? His prompt reply brought full relief. It was couched in kind and encouraging language, and conveyed his hearty concurrence in the main features of my plan. In recognising the generosity of his conduct, I felt also that a great point was gained. Nor did the sequel fail to confirm the first impression. Mr. Wallace gave me all the advantage of his position, and laboured through three anxious years to promote my views as earnestly as if they had been his own.

Within a few days from my sending in the supplementary paper to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I had occasion again to trouble him. Mr. Labouchere having given notice of motion for a bill to amend the Post Office Laws, it seemed important that my plan, unless the Government itself were going to take it up, should be forthwith presented to the public, with a view to its producing some effect on the contemplated legislation; and it became necessary to inquire whether it would be proper to publish the paper. I thought, moreover, that if the Government seriously entertained my project such intention would be given as a reason for withholding leave of publication; and that thus I should obtain some indication on the subject. Without awaiting a reply, I proceeded at once to put the pamphlet in complete readiness for speedy issue, should leave be given; and accordingly, when there came a simple announcement that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had no objection whatever to its publication (a reply to which, I may observe, was appended a name then little known, but now deservedly held in high respect—that of Arthur Helps), I hastened to complete my little work, which was soon afterwards published, the Chancellor of the Exchequer receiving, I believe, the first copy.

Meanwhile I had received many encouraging letters, some from private friends, and others from persons to whom I was less known, or not known at all. Amongst those which gave me most satisfaction there was one from Colonel Colby, who, in expressing approval of my paper, gave me also some account of exertions previously made by himself with a view to the gradual reduction of postage rates for long distances.

A second letter was from Mr. Raikes Currie, who afterwards was a member of the Parliamentary Committee appointed to consider my plan, and a third

from Professor Empson, of Haileybury College, who reported that he had heard my plan spoken of in Edinburgh, at a dinner at the Lord Advocate's, and that in the most favourable terms; and who undertook to speak about it, within a few hours, to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, "if he can listen to anything and anybody except banks and bankers."

Now that penny postage has long been an established fact, and that doubt of its practicability has disappeared in the certainty of success, the circumstances just mentioned may seem trivial; but in the midst of the anxiety that attended its incipient course, every indication of advancing favour was eagerly received and carefully recorded.

Meanwhile, however, a proceeding of yet greater importance had taken place. Soon after the private circulation of my pamphlet, I received a summons to give evidence before the Commission for Post Office Inquiry already mentioned, which was now collecting matter for its ninth report, the subject being the London Twopenny Post (though the term comprehended also the threepenny delivery), and the Commissioners, the late Lord Bessborough (then Lord Duncannon), Lord Taunton (then Mr. Labouchere), and the Duke of Somerset (then Lord Seymour).

I need not say that their invitation was gladly accepted; my first examination took place on February 13th, 1837; and in my evidence I pointed out the principal defects in the existing system of distribution within the London district.

The first was that the deliveries were too few and too slow; and the second, that all letters, whencesoever collected or whithersoever going, had, with some trifling exceptions, to be sent primarily to the central office in St. Martin's-le-Grand. It will hardly be believed now that, by the combined effect of these two mal-arrangements, the time required for an inter-

change of letters within London itself was, on the average, little less than fifteen hours; while between London and Tottenham, the distance from the central office being under seven miles, and the road supplied with coaches passing to and fro at all hours of the day, the average was as high as nearly twenty-five hours.

In the way of remedies, I proposed, first, that the rate, supposing the postage to be prepaid, should be reduced from twopence or threepence to one penny; secondly, that the deliveries should be made hourly; the necessary facilities to be afforded by the establishment of district offices, and the combining in one body the two sets of letter-carriers, then employed, the one in delivering the local, or, as they were called, the twopenny post letters, the other those arriving from without the district, which were called general post letters. These several improvements, I scarcely need say, have now been effected, though after long delay, to be hereafter explained.

Considering the comparatively small amount of reduction to be made on the district letters, leaving the postage, on the average, at nearly one-half of its existing rate, I did not estimate the consequent increase in number, even supposing all facilities to be afforded, at more than threefold. I may observe, in passing, that it is now (1867) more than sevenfold.

For further facility I suggested that improvement in the nomenclature of streets which is now in progress; and I may here mention that as the suggestion was fruitless at the time, I took occasion at a later period, when the bill to establish the Board of Works was in hand, to obtain the insertion of the clause giving the requisite powers. I also prepared a plan of proceeding, which I placed in the hands of an energetic member of that body, since dead.

Having, previously to my examination, in a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, made the first mention of stamps, I repeated the suggestion here. I have already said whence the first notion was derived, and how far it extended; but as there has been some little public discussion on the matter, I extract the relative passage from my evidence:—

‘A few years ago, when the expediency of entirely abolishing the newspaper stamp, and allowing newspapers to pass through the Post Office for one penny each, was under consideration, it was suggested by Mr. Charles Knight, the publisher, that the postage on newspapers might be collected by selling stamped wrappers at one penny each.* Availing myself of this excellent suggestion, I propose the following arrangement:

‘Let stamped covers and sheets of paper be supplied to the public from the Stamp Office or Post Office, as may be most convenient, and sold at such a price as to include the postage. Letters and newspapers so stamped might be put into the letter-box, as at present, instead of being delivered to the receiver.

‘Covers, at various prices, would be required for packets of various weights; and each should have the weight it is entitled to carry legibly printed with the stamp.

* * * * *

‘Should experience warrant the Government in making the use of stamped covers universal, most important advantages will be secured—advantages, indeed, of such magnitude, that before any exception whatever is admitted, the policy of such exception should be very fully considered.

‘1. The Post Office would be relieved altogether from the collection of the revenue, and from all accounts relating to that collection. Distribution would be its only function.

* * * * *

‘The only objection which occurs to me to the universal adoption of this plan is the following: Persons unaccustomed to write letters would, perhaps, be at a loss how to proceed. They might send or take their letters to the Post Office without having had recourse to the stamp. It

* Neither Mr. Knight nor I was then aware of an earlier though long abandoned use of stamped covers in France. See p. 224.

is true that, on presentation of the letter, the receiver, instead of accepting the money as postage, might take it as the price of a cover or band, in which the bringer might immediately enclose the letter, and then redirect it; but the bringer would sometimes be unable to write. Perhaps this difficulty might be obviated by using a bit of paper just large enough to bear the stamp, and covered at the back with a glutinous wash, which the bringer might, by applying a little moisture, attach to the back of the letter, so as to avoid the necessity for redirecting it.*

It is curious to observe, by the last paragraph of the above, that the adhesive stamp, now of universal and indeed almost exclusive use, was originally devised as a mere expedient for exceptional cases; the stamped cover, which it has displaced, being the means of payment which was expected to become general. Long afterwards, when in familiar use, the adhesive stamp was thus humorously described by Sir Francis Head:

‘A postage stamp is a new coin of the realm expressly devised for the prepayment of letters; “and,” said an Irishman in describing it to his mate, “the only difference I can see between it and a donkey is, that the one you lick with a stick and the other you stick with a lick.”†

Although I hoped at this time, that in order to relieve the Post Office of all account-keeping, and to prevent all avoidable delay in delivery, prepayment would eventually be made universal, yet, knowing how much better it is to induce than to compel, I proposed that in the outset, at least, the alternative should be allowed; the old rate of two-pence or threepence remaining undiminished where payment was deferred.‡

My first examination being finished, I was in-

* ‘Ninth Report of Commissioners for Post Office Enquiry,’ pp. 32, 33. Same substantially, ‘Post Office Reform,’ second edition, pp. 41-45.

† ‘Quarterly Review,’ for July, 1850.

‡ ‘Ninth Report of Commissioners for Post Office Enquiry,’ pp. 38, 40.

formed that Mr. Robert Smith, then head of the Twopenny Post Department, would be called on for his evidence, and that afterwards I should have opportunity of commenting thereon. Knowing that there would be much difference between us, and fearing that reply and rejoinder, if made in the ordinary way, might weary out the Commissioners before they could arrive at any sound conclusion, I ventured to suggest that we should be examined together. I was not aware of any precedent for this course, nor do I know that it has ever been repeated. The plan, however, was adopted by the Commissioners, and with good success. In this manner, statement promptly met counter-statement, and argument counter-argument; so much so, indeed, that the proceeding, as will be seen on reference to the evidence,* eventually took the form rather of discussion between Mr. Smith and me than of examination of either; much to the saving of time, and the facilitation of conclusions.

Mr. Wallace also gave earnest evidence in support of my views, and the result was that the Commissioners recommended as immediate measures, by way of experiment, the optional use of stamped penny covers within the London District, increase in the weight allowed in a single packet, and an additional daily delivery; and on the presentation to the House of Commons of an important petition, of which I shall speak hereafter, Lord Duncannon announced that it was the intention of Government to carry so much of the plan into effect.†

While I could not but regard this concession as a great triumph, I had nevertheless to guard against a serious danger; the reality of which subsequent events did not fail to demonstrate. Lord Dun-

* 'Ninth Report of Commissioners for Post Office Enquiry,' p. 34.

† 'Post Office Reform,' third edition, p. 90.

cannon's intimation that the contemplated change would be considered as a trial of the general plan, made it necessary to guard against inferences to be drawn from a partial failure, which was but too probable; for where the reduction in postage would be but small, frequent and rapid delivery was my main dependence; and this, in the proposed measure, was to receive scarcely any attention. Now should this be regarded as a trial of my plan, and should its results, in consequence of its incompleteness, fall short of what I held out as likely to follow its complete adoption, there was little chance that either the Post Office, or the Government, or the public, or even the Commissioners, would draw the necessary distinction and attribute the partial failure to its true cause. I therefore felt that I must put the matter in its true light, and that before trial should begin. I consequently wrote to the Secretary of the Commissioners a letter, in which, while expressing my satisfaction at the intended change, I begged leave very distinctly to point out that it would afford no test of my plan, as this could not be fairly tried unless adopted in its integrity so as to comprehend division into districts with hourly deliveries.* This last course, therefore, I again urged on the Commissioners; pointing out that the amount of revenue at stake in so limited a change was but small; that success here would warrant extension of the plan, while failure would set the matter at rest.

I had the satisfaction to learn that this letter produced its intended effect. After reconsidering the question, the Commissioners, guardedly, but yet distinctly, spoke in favour of complete adoption within the London District;† a course, I may observe, which, besides its immediate benefit, would

* 'Ninth Report of Commissioners for Post Office Enquiry,' p. 87.

† 'Ninth Report,' pp. 8, 9.

have subjected my plan to a tolerably fair experiment. I may add that their report contains specimens of stamped envelopes, sent in by the well-known paper-maker, Mr. Dickinson, who had given evidence on the subject. It is curious to remark that the point on which the Commissioners spoke with most hesitation is one which never presented any real difficulty, viz., the practicability of general prepayment.

It now only remained to see whether the Government would act on the recommendation of its own Commission, which certainly seemed the more probable as all the Commissioners were likewise members of Government. This fair prospect, however, ended in disappointment; nothing whatever being done, and my only consolation for the moment being that my plan had escaped an unfair trial.

The rejection of this very moderate and limited improvement made it clear that the only course left was to bring the public voice to bear forcibly on the question. I was, as already implied, very reluctant to take any step to promote such a result; and I had even, in the first edition of my pamphlet, held forth an earnest warning on the subject. I give the passage. Unfortunately for the Government, as well as for myself, it proved prophetic to the letter:—

‘Judging from the rapid growth of public opinion which we have recently witnessed with regard to other institutions, we may expect that in a few years, or even months, if “the still small voice” which, at present, gives scarcely audible expression to half-formed desires, be neglected, it will swell into a loud, distinct, and irresistible demand; and then a reform, which would now be received with gratitude, as one of the greatest boons ever conferred on a people by its Government, would perhaps be taken without thanks, and even with expressions of disappointment, because less extensive than unreasonable people might have expected.’*

* ‘Post Office Reform,’ first edition, p. 53, second edition, p. 65.

But could the public voice be drawn forth? Doubtless the proposed reduction of postage would be acceptable enough; but would the measure be regarded as practicable, as capable of adoption without such loss to the revenue as would necessitate the imposition of yet heavier burdens? Could the public be got to take the plan into its serious consideration? Was not a proposal so paradoxical likely to be classed with numberless wild schemes, which had enjoyed a momentary attention only to be thrown aside with scorn? Was not a conclusion, which had startled myself, even when I had arrived at it by laborious investigation, likely to be ridiculed as absurd by those to whom it was presented in the abrupt manner in which it would inevitably reach most minds? That a large portion of the public would thus deal with it was beyond all doubt; and would there be a yet larger or more influential body to take the opposite course? Even supposing this to be so, would the majority be sufficiently large and influential to carry Parliament with it, to constrain Government, and to overbear the Post Office; which, so far as indications went, seemed likely to put forth all its powers of obstruction?

These questions it was not easy to answer; but repeated success in innovation had inspired confidence; and bold as the attempt appeared, and doubtful as the issue must be, it was advised by the family that trial should be made; and knowing that I should derive thence whatever aid it was in its power to afford, I proceeded to the work; having, however, as yet no more time to employ in it than remained after the full discharge of the duties attaching to my post as Secretary to the South Australian Commission.

As mentioned before, I had already published the pamphlet previously circulated as private and con-

fidential, and it is to this publication that I have already made repeated reference, under the title, 'Post Office Reform, Second Edition;' a misnomer adopted for convenience.

The appearance of the pamphlet speedily brought in letters from various quarters, amongst others an amusing one from Leigh Hunt, in which he declared that the reasoning of my pamphlet "carries us all along with it as smoothly as wheel on railroad," and another from a gentleman known to me in relation to Australian affairs, who advised that my pamphlet should be republished in as cheap a form as possible, offering himself to bear half the expense; an offer afterwards repeated by Mr. Cobden. Why these offers were not accepted I cannot now recollect. The same gentleman also informed me of a remarkable instance of exorbitant postage which had come to his knowledge. The captain of a ship arriving at Deal had posted for London a packet weighing thirty-two ounces, which came to the addressee charged with a postage not of five shillings and sixpence, according to the rate proposed by me, but of upwards of six pounds, "being," as my informant observed, "four times as much as the charge for an inside place by the mail." So that, had the captain, instead of posting the packet, sent a special messenger with it up to London, allowing him to travel inside both ways, and paying him handsomely for his time, as well as indemnifying him for his travelling expenses, the result would have been a considerable saving.

The following yet stronger case was afterwards thus mentioned in a letter from Sir John Burgoyne to my friend Mr. Moffatt, who obligingly placed the letter in my hands. I cannot, however, pass over the name of this gallant veteran without gratefully mentioning that he was one of those who zealously co-operated in the movement. Even at his present advanced

age his interest in postal success remains warm and active.

'Office of Public Works, Dublin,
' May 8, 1839.

* * * * *

'A packet of official papers was to be transmitted by one of our officers from a country town: it seems that *parcels* for the mail were in that town received in the same shop as the letters; and either by mistake of the messenger or of the postmaster, this packet, which was meant to be a *parcel*, was forwarded as a *letter*. The charge was 11*l.*; that is, for a packet that I could readily carry off in my pocket; an amount for which I could have taken the *whole mail*; places for four insides, and three out, with their portmanteaus, carpet-bags, &c. &c. &c.'

The following incident I found not less amusing than encouraging:—

Mr. Francis Place, the author of '*Principles of Population*,' but better known as a leading man on the Liberal side at Westminster elections, and as an earnest friend, though no flatterer, of the working-classes, with whom also I had some previous acquaintance, having received a copy of my pamphlet, remarked to an inquiring friend that he had not thought it worth perusal, having supposed that it was only some nonsensical scheme for carrying letters all over England for a penny, and being wearied out with wild-goose proposals for all sorts of impracticable measures. Having, however, on further urgency, promised to look at the thing some fine day, he at length, as he afterwards avowed, began the perusal in the confident expectation that he should soon find out "*the hitch*!" and although as he went on he step by step admitted the soundness of the reasoning, he was still sure that he should find "*the hitch*" somewhere. In this quest he read on to the end of the book, finishing with the exclamation, —I quote his own words—"I'll be damned if there

is a hitch." I have no doubt, from Mr. Place's great activity, that though he was an old man, his new conviction did not remain merely speculative.

And here, perhaps, I may be excused if I mention one member of my family, now no more, who, though unknown save in his own neighbourhood, where, however, he was highly respected, used his industry and his local influence, both great, from first to last, in aid of the cause, viz., my brother-in-law, Mr. Francis Clark, one of the magistrates of Birmingham, but afterwards resident at Adelaide, South Australia.

Some of the journals, also, began to notice my pamphlet, the *Morning Herald* being, I believe, the first; while the *Globe*, the *Scotsman*, and the *Birmingham Journal*, very quickly followed; the *Times* also took up the cause, and within the year the support of the press was almost universal. Amongst all, however, the most earnest was the *Spectator*, then conducted by my friend, the late Mr. Rintoul, which maintained throughout his editorship, with unflagging earnestness, the able advocacy then begun.

A little later, but still within two months from the appearance of the pamphlet, Mr. Gibbon Wakefield informed me that he and Mr. Rintoul had had a conference with Daniel O'Connell, who not only promised his powerful aid, but even volunteered to move for a committee on the plan. I suppose, however he must have given way to Mr. Wallace, who, about a week later, viz., on May 9th, made a motion for that purpose, which, nevertheless, he withdrew at the request of Lord John Russell and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who informed the House that the plan was under the consideration of Government. This, I may observe, was the second mention of my plan in Parliament, the first having been made some

time before by one of its most earnest advocates, Mr. Joseph Hume.

About a fortnight later, I received a letter from Lord Ashburton, appointing a day for seeing me in reference to a petition which he had undertaken to present to the House of Lords, a petition remarkable for the high character or important position of its signatories, some of them men of first standing in the city, and others of literary or scientific eminence. This presentation accordingly took place on May 30th, and, in his speech, Lord Ashburton gave an able abstract of the plan, adding to nearly all its chief points the sanction of his authority.* On the same evening an identical petition was presented to the House of Commons by Mr. Grote, others soon following by Mr. (now Sir William) Hutt, and Mr. Charles Villiers.

All this was very satisfactory, but about a fortnight later, viz., on June 15th, the plan and its supporters had to endure strictures the reverse of complimentary. The Earl of Lichfield, then Postmaster-General, in moving the second reading of a bill relative to Post Office affairs, asserted, in opposition to Lord Ashburton, that the revenue of the department had considerably increased, that it was produced by 170,000,000 of letters annually circulated in England, and that if the reduction in duty for which some individuals called were acceded to, it would require the enormous number of 416,000,000 annually to produce the same amount of revenue.† “With respect to the plan set forth by Mr. Hill,” he said, “of all the wild and visionary schemes which he had ever heard or read of, it was the most extraordinary.”‡

* ‘Post Office Reform,’ third edition, p. 93; ‘Hansard,’ vol. xxxviii. p. 1098.

† ‘Hansard,’ vol. xxxviii. p. 1464.

‡ p. 1462-1464.

Save the completion of the 'Ninth Report of the Commissioners for Post Office Enquiry,' already so often referred to, and the passing of the Act moved by Lord Lichfield, of the value of which I shall speak presently, little of importance occurred during the next two months, except that I procured an introduction to his lordship, from his brother, the late General Anson, then visiting at the house of my father-in-law, Mr. Pearson; and being admitted to an interview, obtained, through his means, a certain amount of information from the Post Office, which, though not all that I sought, was yet of considerable use.

On October 19th the matter was brought before the Court of Common Council of the City of London, by the late Mr. Pritchard, then High Bailiff of Southwark, who invited me to attend below the bar, that I might be at hand for reference. While there, Mr. Pritchard having mentioned, on my authority, that the conveyance of a mail from London to Edinburgh cost no more than five pounds, a member of the Common Council, perhaps confounding mail with mail-coach, came to me, inquiring whether I had really made such an assertion; and upon my answering in the affirmative, walked away with every expression of scorn for a statement so obviously absurd. I need not remind the reader that the amount was afterwards proved by Post Office Returns to be less than four pounds. Fortunately the court did not agree with the critic; resolutions being passed in favour of the plan, and a petition for its adoption ordered to be presented to both Houses of Parliament; which was accordingly done with the usual ceremonies.

Towns' meetings also began to be held in other places; and at Aberdeen, Elgin, and elsewhere, there were not only favourable resolutions passed,

and corresponding petitions ordered, but these were accompanied with a vote of thanks to me, as the author of the plan. Favourable resolutions were also passed by the Chambers of Commerce of Edinburgh and Dundee, a memorial was sent in by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, and a petition from the Stock Exchange. These events, combined with others previously mentioned, had given me a confidence, which, self-reliant as I was prone to be, my own unaided convictions could not have supplied.

Meantime, although my plan was for a time set aside, the various efforts made in relation to the general subject were not altogether without effect; for, in the course of this year, day mails were established on one or two of the principal roads, though with some troublesome restrictions; amongst them, one which now seems incredible, viz., against their use for the despatch of the morning papers. Again—and this was at the time no small matter—advantage had been promptly taken of the opening of the Grand Junction Railway (that by which the line from London to Birmingham was in effect extended to Liverpool and Manchester) for accelerating the conveyance of the north-western mails. Some further reductions were made in foreign postage; though certainly with due caution, as will now be readily acknowledged by any one who learns that by an announcement gravely made, the public were informed that henceforth postage on letters to the Mediterranean would be at the rate of “only ten *shillings* per ounce.”*

The legislative change already referred to as introduced by Lord Lichfield was an important improvement, bringing all the Acts (one hundred and forty-one in number) relative to the Post Office into a single law, possessing the triple advantage of

* Post Office advertisement, *Morning Chronicle*, August 22, 1837.

compactness, brevity, and perfect intelligibility. The bill for effecting this was drawn, I may remark, by my friend Mr. Arthur Symonds. Another Act authorised the Postmaster-General, with the consent of the Lords of the Treasury, to make reductions in postage, both partially and generally; a trust which afterwards proved of no small convenience.*

Lastly, Government had announced as probable that the postage between towns not more than seven miles apart would be reduced from fourpence to twopence; a change soon afterwards effected.

All these improvements, while more or less beneficial in themselves, had the collateral advantage of paving the way for future changes; and certainly enough remained to be done, as would appear in the most striking manner, were the old state of things to be restored but for a single day, and the public compelled but for once to endure practices which were then regarded as things of course. Many of these have been already adverted to; perhaps one or two more may with propriety be mentioned here.

The delivery of letters arriving by the night mail, which is now completed throughout London and even in many of the suburbs by nine A.M., was not then concluded, even in the Lombard Street district, probably as much favoured as any, till eleven, save to those who purchased the anticipation of an hour and a half by special payment. And I may here remark that the mode in which "the early delivery" was secured to those so favoured served to enforce my arguments for the practice of prepayment; the way being for the postman to leave the letters without awaiting payment at the time, and to return afterwards to collect the postage; so that in this delivery he had little more to do than to walk on as fast as he could; whereas according to the ordinary

* 'Post Office Reform,' third edition, p. 89.

mode, the time, returned by the Post Office as occupied in delivery, averaged nearly two minutes per letter.*

As the day mails were so few, most of the letters arriving in London by the morning mails on their way to other towns had to lie all day at the General Post Office; so that places corresponding through London, even if very near to one another, were, in postal distance, kept as far asunder as London and Durham; and when a blank post-day intervened, the delay was even more remarkable. Thus a letter written at Uxbridge after the close of the Post Office on Friday night was not delivered at Gravesend, a distance of less than forty miles, until Tuesday morning.

Again, the operation of the threepenny post was so ludicrously slow that no one thought of employing it where despatch was of the slightest importance. To interchange letters between London and Hampstead required, under the most favourable circumstances, about ten hours; though a messenger would have walked over the ground in little more than two.

If two letters were put in the proper district receiving-houses in London between five and six o'clock in the evening, one addressed to Highgate, the other to Wolverhampton (which lies one hundred and twenty miles further on the same road), the Highgate letter was delivered last.

The postage of a letter from Wolverhampton to Brierley Hill, conveyed by a cross-post passing through Dudley, was only one penny; whereas if the letter stopped short at Dudley, thus saving some miles in conveyance, the charge rose to fourpence.

The absurd rule of charging by number of enclosures, instead of by weight, often caused great irritation, especially when any one of the enclosures

* 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 28.

was very diminutive. Thus in an instance reported to me at the time, a certain letter from London to Wolverhampton, which now would be conveyed for one penny, came charged with a postage of two shillings and sixpence, viz., tenpence for the letter, tenpence for a returned bill of exchange enclosed therein, and tenpence for a small scrap of paper attached to this latter at the notary's office.

On the poorer classes the inconveniences fell with special weight, for as letters almost always arrived unpaid, while the postage was often too heavy to be met at the moment, letters were sometimes withheld for days, or even weeks, until the means of discharge could be raised.*

The necessity for ascertaining the number of enclosures compelled the examination of every doubtful letter, by the light of a lamp or candle placed behind it; and this inspection, leading to the discovery of bank-notes, &c., which otherwise might have escaped remark, exposed the clerks to needless temptation, led to many acts of dishonesty, and brought much loss to correspondents.

In addition to the dishonesty thus directly injurious to individuals, there were other frauds which materially affected the revenue. Such was the complication of accounts, that the deputy postmasters could not be held to effectual responsibility as respects the amounts due from them to the General Office; and as many instances of deficit came at times to light, sometimes following each other week after week in the same office, there can be no doubt that the total annual loss must have reached a serious amount.†

A third edition of my pamphlet being called for

* 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 93.

† 'Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Enquiry,' p. 66.

'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 69.

within the year, I took advantage of this, both to notify new facts, and to indicate any further development of my own views.

The net revenue of the Post Office for the year 1836 (unknown at the time of my previous publication) showed some increase, and was expected moreover to be in turn surpassed by that for 1837. This progress was encouraging; for as the recent changes in the Post Office arrangements, though not of a decided character, consisted chiefly in reduced charges and increased facilities, the results were, *pro tanto*, confirmatory of the soundness of the principles which I had advocated. The augmentation in net revenue, moreover, was the more striking because, by the reduction of the stamp duty on newspapers, these had so increased in number, that their conveyance and distribution, all of course gratuitous, now comprised several additional millions; and because, at the same time, commercial depression had reduced the revenue in every other department.*

This last fact could not but be viewed by some as a formidable obstacle to the plan; and though I did not see it in that light, believing that a reduction of postage would give a stimulus to commerce, which would greatly benefit all the other sources of revenue, I suggested that the difficulty could be met by such gradual adoption of the plan as might suit the caution or timidity of the controlling authorities. My recommendations appear in the following extract:—†

‘It cannot be doubted that a reduction in postage to a certain extent would benefit the Post Office revenue, and an opinion to this effect is very general in the Post Office itself. Let, then, a general system of reductions be put into immediate operation, and extended as rapidly as the state of the revenue will permit; and concurrently with this, let

* ‘Post Office Reform,’ third edition, p. 48.

† p. 49.

the means here pointed out for simplifying the mechanism of the Post Office be adopted as far as practicable, in order that the consequent increase in the amount of business may not require an increased establishment.'

To give effect to these recommendations, I proposed that, as a first step, the postage between post towns should be immediately reduced by one half; that charge should depend no longer on number of enclosures, but on weight; that stamps should serve at first for a very limited range, say for fifteen miles; so that the numerous mistakes expected to occur in their use (of which there was much groundless apprehension) might admit of speedy and easy correction; and, though at that time very desirous of seeing prepayment made universal, because of the complete simplicity which it would introduce into the Post Office accounts, I recommended that an option should be given, by which prepayment should always be lower by one penny than post payment. Of course in recommending these expedients I did not swerve from my original design; my expressed desire being that these first measures should be gradually extended, as experience warranted, until the whole plan was in operation.*

Much anxiety had been expressed, which under present circumstances seems ludicrous enough, as to the means by which the increased number of letters, on which I relied for sustaining the revenue, could be conveyed from town to town. A five-fold increase, it was maintained, would require a five-fold number of mail-coaches; and I was charged with having omitted this material fact in my calculations. Reply was easy, because, first, the existing mail-coaches were by no means fully laden, many of them indeed having very little to carry; and secondly—which will now appear remarkable—the chargeable letters formed

* 'Post Office Reform,' third edition, p. 49.

but an inconsiderable part of the mail ; the bulk of which consisted partly of newspapers, and partly of letters and packages sent under franks, insomuch that, startling as this may seem, the chargeable letters then divided among the four-and-twenty mail-coaches which left London every night, without displacing a single passenger, and without exceeding or even equalling the ordinary load, have been all forwarded by a single coach. In short, instead of being justly exposed to the charge of omission, I had made in my calculations, through excess of caution, more than due allowance for the increased expense, and that by the large amount of 100,000l.*

Fortunately I was able truly to add “that though my plan, with its estimates, had then been before the public for several months, and though both had been submitted not only to the general inquirer, but to the scrutinising examination of those who had most opportunity for acquiring knowledge on the subject, no statement had appeared which invalidated any one of the calculations.”†

Caution in statement, I may observe, had been strengthened in me by almost all the various training through which I had passed. As an instructor, a surveyor, a machinist, an inventor, a responsible secretary to an important enterprise, I had had constant need for its exercise ; the more so, perhaps, as I was keenly sensible to the ridicule that follows error, especially in innovators.

To return to my immediate subject. By this time, the result of a reduction of postage made six years before in a large portion of the London district, by the extension of the twopenny range, had been shown to be favourable ; a return on the subject having been called for by the Commissioners of Post Office Enquiry.

* ‘Post Office Reform,’ third edition, p. 51-3.

† p. 54.

It had been calculated by the Post Office authorities that this reduction would reduce the gross revenue to the extent of 20,000*l.* per annum; whereas at the end of six years the revenue, instead of being a loser, was by 10,000*l.* a gainer.*

Considerable reductions also had recently taken place in the postage of foreign letters; reductions already followed by a great increase in receipts. Neither had any instance occurred, within my knowledge, in which reduction of postage had, after a fair trial, been attended with loss to the revenue.†

To this third edition of my pamphlet was given a preface, written by my brother Arthur, my successor at Bruce Castle, from matter supplied by myself, in which a parallel was suggested between my plan, contending as it then was against opposition from the Post Office authorities, and Palmer's great improvement, carried fifty years before, over obstacles raised to it from the same quarter. This preface, being copied in part or in whole into various journals, attracted much public attention; and doubtless had some effect in satisfying or silencing those who argued against the probability of a stranger being able, in Post Office affairs, to improve on the knowledge of Post Office officials. Doubtless, as I had already acknowledged,‡ my want of practical familiarity with the arrangements of the Post Office was a disadvantage, and may have led me into some misconception in matters of minor importance; but probably such disadvantage was counterbalanced by the absence of those prejudices in favour of an established routine, to which men wholly engrossed in practical duties are peculiarly and unavoidably, liable.

* 'Post Office Reform,' third edition, p. 71. 'Ninth Report of Commissioners of Post Office Enquiry,' p. 22.

† 'Post Office Reform,' third edition, p. 73.

‡ 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 64.

This preface is dated November 15th, 1837, and the third edition of my pamphlet must have appeared a few days later. On the 23rd, Parliament having meantime reassembled, Mr. Wallace renewed his motion for a committee on my plan, and though but ten months had elapsed since my first publication, such was already the progress of public opinion, due in great measure to the energetic support of my many earnest friends and the powerful advocacy of the public press, that the committee was not only granted, but, as would appear from the silence of ‘Hansard,’ without even a debate. The nomination of its members, which took place four days later, gave the following list:—Mr. Wallace, Mr. Poulett Thomson, Viscount Lowther, Lord Seymour, Mr. Warburton, Sir Thomas Fremantle, Mr. Raikes Currie, Mr. Morgan John O’Connell, Mr. Thornely, Mr. Chalmers, Mr. Pease, Mr. Mahony, Mr. Parker (Sheffield), Mr. George William Wood, Mr. Villiers.*

The reference or instruction to the committee was as follows:—

‘To inquire into the present rates and mode of charging postage, with a view to such a reduction thereof as may be made without injury to the revenue; and for this purpose to examine especially into the mode recommended for charging and collecting postage in a pamphlet published by Mr. Rowland Hill.’†

Three members of this committee—viz., Lord Seymour, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Poulett Thomson (afterwards Lord Sydenham)—were also members of Government, and, as I soon found, sat as opponents to the plan. I need not say, however, that the appointment of the committee, whatever adverse elements it might contain, filled me with high expectations;

* ‘Third Report of the Select Committee on Postage,’ p. 2.

† ‘Third Report of the Select Committee on Postage,’ p. 2.

so well assured was I by this time of the soundness of my views, and so confident that they would derive abundant support from the examination to be made, whatever might be the ultimate decision of the committee; though on this point also I had good hopes.

Three days later the Duke of Richmond, in presenting the petition from Elgin, took occasion to recommend at least a considerable reduction of postage rates, his opinion carrying the greater weight, as he had formerly filled the office of Postmaster-General. Lord Lichfield, in reply, declared that "were the plan [of penny postage] adopted, instead of a million and a half of money being added to the revenue, after the expenditure of the establishment was provided for, he was quite certain that such a loss would be sustained as would compel them to have recourse to Parliament for money to maintain the establishment." Lord Brougham, however, in presenting a petition from the merchants and traders of London, declared that nothing which had fallen from Lord Lichfield had shaken his confidence in Mr. Hill's plan.* His lordship again spoke to the same effect a fortnight later, when the Earl of Radnor, in presenting a petition from the London booksellers, also advised a large reduction in postage rates.† Indeed I may say, once for all, that neither then nor afterwards did Lord Brougham ever lose an opportunity of giving my plan his powerful support.

On the same day (December 15th, 1837), Mr. Hawes having asked in the House of Commons whether Government had decided to give effect to the recommendation of the Commissioners with regard to stamped covers, the Chancellor of the Exchequer replied that it was intended to introduce them in the twopenny post department.

* 'Hansard,' third series, vol. xxxix. pp. 376-381. † pp. 1014-1015.

In thus first mentioning the name of Mr. (afterwards Sir Benjamin) Hawes, I feel bound to add that the interest which he showed thus early in my plan became warmer and warmer as time advanced, and never ceased till his death. The same may be said of Mr. Hume, and yet more emphatically of Mr. Warburton.

The real purport of the announcement now made, though it does not clearly appear so in the words quoted, was that the stamped cover should be used within the range of the twopenny and threepenny post, but without any reduction of postage there, so that it would be merely a mode of payment in advance (such payment not being then customary), without any motive to its use.

Sir Robert Peel pertinently asked if the two plans of reducing the postage and using stamped covers could not be combined; but the Chancellor of the Exchequer replied that "they would try the latter experiment first on the twopenny post. If it succeeded they would try it on an extended scale; at the same time he was bound to say that while he did not wish to speak disparagingly of an attempt he was himself about to try, he must add he was not very sanguine as to the result."*

Three days later, Lord Brougham, in presenting the petition from the Lord Mayor and Common Council of the City of London, after having given some account of Palmer's great improvement, spoken of the opposition which it encountered, of the gloomy predictions made as to its inevitable consequences, and of the grand results obtained by its adoption, proceeded to comment on the intention of Government to deviate so widely from the recommendation of the Commissioners of Post Office Enquiry as to adopt a plan "totally different in its nature, and

* 'Hansard,' third series, vol. xxxix. pp. 1115-1116.

which might fail over and over again without the possibility of even a Post Office speculator pretending that it was a failure of Mr. Hill's plan, because it was to be confined to the twopenny post." Lord Duncannon replied that, "after mature consideration, it was found to be inexpedient to try the experiment of Mr. Hill's plan to the full extent that had been proposed. His Right Hon. friend (the Chancellor of the Exchequer) did not intend to carry the suggestions of the Commissioners into effect the way proposed, but he determined on the issue of penny* stamp covers for the short distances, and to reduce the four-penny post to twopence. He admitted that this could not be considered as a trial of Mr. Hill's plan, but he thought it the safer course in the first instance.†

The Postmaster-General, after having stated the annual number of chargeable letters passing through the Post Office (previously given by himself as 170,000,000) to be only 42,000,000, charged me with having entirely omitted to provide for the greater bulk of additional letters required by my plan, and alleged that "if the postage charge were generally reduced to a penny per letter, it would require twelve times the present circulation of letters to produce the revenue now derived from the Post Office charges."‡ He added, "the mails will have to carry twelve times as much in weight, and therefore the charge for transmission, instead of 100,000*l.* as now, must be twelve times that amount."§

The day after this announcement—alarmed at the notion of an experiment whose inevitable failure was sure, in spite of Lord Duncannon's disclaimer, to be viewed, as so far a failure of my plan—I wrote to

* The word "penny," though found in 'Hansard,' is, as shown by what follows, erroneously inserted.

† 'Hansard,' third series, vol. xxxix. pp. 1201-1210.

‡ 'Hansard,' vol. xxxix. p. 1207.

§ 'Mirror of Parliament,' vol. xxxviii. p. 833.

the Chancellor of the Exchequer, asking whether, before the change was made, I might be afforded an opportunity of stating my views on the subject; at the same time I expressed a hope that as I had in the first instance submitted my plan to Government, had taken pains to secure accuracy in all my statements, and had, while attacking a system, carefully avoided all personalities, I might be considered as entitled to some attention, and even indulgence. The Chancellor politely replied that he should have much pleasure in seeing me, but was unable at present to fix a day for doing so; I cannot find, however, either in my memory or in my memoranda, that this day ever came.

So closed the year 1837, one of the busiest and most important in my life; comprising my first application to Government, the publication and republication and second republication of my pamphlet, my examination before the Commissioners of Post Office Enquiry, my hope founded on their recommendation, its disappointment, my appeal to the public, the appointment of a parliamentary committee, and the earnest and various support which had been accorded.

Considering that less than eighteen months had elapsed from my first earnest attention to the subject, and that I had not only worked with all the difficulties and disadvantages of an *outsider*, but with the duties of my post as South Australian Secretary pressing heavily upon me, I had every reason to be satisfied and even delighted with my progress, though I will not undertake to say that I thought so at the time. However, I had full encouragement to proceed, the more so as I could not then foresee that two more years of incessant toil would precede the adoption of my plan—a toil which would have been beyond my strength but for the constant assistance received from the various members of my family.

CHAPTER III.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE.

I OPENED the year 1838 with a series of letters to Lord Lichfield, which were obligingly inserted in all the morning papers, the first appearing on January 9th. These letters were written in the manner described below; and it may save trouble hereafter to remark that much else which has appeared under my name, together with not a little to be found in my minutes at the Treasury and at the Post Office, was produced in the same way. To me the device and elaboration of plans was incomparably easier than their exposition or advocacy; with my brother Arthur the case was the reverse; and this led me to the frequent employment of his pen. What neither of us could have effected separately, joint action made easy.

Our mode of proceeding was as follows: I having collected and arranged my facts and formed a skeleton of the proposed paper, we sat down together, my brother dictating and I writing, often however pausing to bring the language into more exact expression of my thoughts, or to mention, or at times to learn, some new idea that arose as we went on. Occasionally, however, when business pressed we worked apart; but in any case the whole paper so constructed underwent our joint revision, and we sometimes found that the thoughts with which we started had, in the

very attempt to express them, undergone such modification that we rejected all that had been done, and began our task afresh.

The letters to Lord Lichfield were written mainly in reply to his lordship's speeches in Parliament, from which some passages have already been cited. From these letters I give one or two quotations :—

‘In the series of letters which I shall take the liberty of addressing to your lordship, I hope I shall carefully maintain that respect for the claims, and consideration for the feelings of others, which, I trust, have marked all that I have hitherto written. Your lordship must be well aware that whoever enters on the task of innovation, must expect some amount of ridicule or abuse aimed either at his plan or himself. Your lordship must feel that a person so circumstanced ought not to allow such a necessary consequence of his attempt either to deter him from his adopted course, or to provoke his retaliation.

‘I take this opportunity of publicly thanking your lordship for the courtesy, which I have in private experienced at your hands in every communication with which I have been honoured, whether in person or by letter.’

The following passage from the third letter is in reply to the announcement by Government that the *principle* of stamped covers would be tried in the London District :—

‘Should the trial of stamped covers on the plan now unfortunately contemplated issue in success, the world will indeed see a paradox,—an effect without a cause. Were such an experiment merely useless it might pass without comment; but its inevitable failure may produce no small mischief. An apparent trial of a plan may easily be confounded with a real one; and though I am sure nothing could be further from the intentions of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, yet had the aim been to throw unfair discredit on the plan, it would have been difficult to devise a better mode of proceeding.’

The following are passages from the last letter :—

‘Again, your lordship has fallen into the error of supposing

that in twelve-folding the number of letters we shall twelve-fold the bulk of the whole mail. Of this error the refutation is supplied by another part of your lordship's speech, where it is stated that, while the average number of letters despatched by the evening mails is below thirty thousand, the average number of newspapers by the same conveyance is nearly sixty thousand. Now as the average weight of a newspaper is about six times that of a letter, and the average number of newspapers double that of letters, it follows that the total weight of the newspapers is twelve times that of the letters—consequently that a twelve-fold increase in the number of letters (even if such an increase were necessary to sustain the revenue) would only make the weight of letters equal to that of newspapers, and therefore would only double the present load ; so that even were all the evening mail-coaches at present loaded to the full (and your lordship will find that the average is not nearly half a load), a double number of these coaches would be sufficient.

* * * * *

‘There is one remaining objection which, as it can scarcely have been made seriously, needs but little remark. Your lordship objects that on the required increase in the amount of correspondence “the whole area on which the Post Office stands would not be large enough to receive the clerks and the letters.” Without adverting to the means which I have distinctly pointed out for obviating any such inconvenience, I am sure that your lordship will not have much hesitation in deciding whether in this great and commercial country the size of the Post Office is to be regulated by the amount of correspondence, or the amount of correspondence by the size of the Post Office.’

About the time that the last of these letters appeared, an important movement, which had been already some weeks in preparation, took definite shape. Mr. Moffatt, afterwards M.P. for Southampton, having sought an interview with me, had proposed the establishment of a “Mercantile Committee,” to collect evidence in favour of the plan ; and his proposal being, of course, gladly accepted, he went to work with such earnestness, that I soon found in him one of my most

zealous, steady, and efficient supporters. Funds he raised with comparative ease, but the formation of a committee he found more difficult than he had expected. Now, however, February 5th, 1838, he wrote to inform me that he had at length prevailed upon Mr. Bates, of the House of Baring Brothers, to accept the office of chairman; and this point being secured, other good members were easily obtained.

As soon as the committee was formed, I was invited to attend, in order to give such information as might seem desirable, and to answer such questions as any of the members might wish to propose; an ordeal which, happily, ended satisfactorily to both parties.

Mr. Ashurst, father of the present solicitor to the Post Office, having been requested to act as solicitor to the committee, went promptly to work; and though by choice he acted gratuitously, laboured with as much ardour as if important personal interests were involved in the issue. No less earnestness was shown by Mr. Henry Cole, who had been engaged to aid in the work. He was author of a *jeu d'esprit*, which attracted considerable attention at the time, as many as a hundred thousand copies being issued, and which doubtless was read by many whose attention the same matter, in a more serious form, would have failed to obtain. This was an imaginary scene at Windsor Castle, the characters being Her Majesty the Queen, Lord Melbourne, Lord Lichfield, and myself. Of course my cause was made victorious, the royal commendation being bestowed on my efforts, while the Prime Minister and the Postmaster-General were duly snubbed, the one for indifference, the other for opposition. This, however, was only one of the almost innumerable devices by which Mr. Cole, in his indefatigable ingenuity, contrived to draw public attention to the proposed measure. Another amusing

stroke consisted in passing through the Post Office, and afterwards exhibiting in fac-simile to the public eye (the originals being previously shown in Parliament), two letters, so arranged as to display, in the clearest light, the absurdity of the existing rule of charge. Of these, one nearly as light as a feather, and almost small enough to require a pair of forceps for its handling, quite a letter for Lilliput, but containing an enclosure, bore double postage; while the other, weighing nearly an ounce, eight inches broad, and more than a foot long, a very creditable letter for Brobdingnag, but all written on one sheet, had its postage single.

I scarcely need add that, while he thus roused attention, he also circulated solid information. This was conveyed chiefly through a periodical entitled 'The Post Circular,' of which Mr. Cole was the editor, and which was carried on throughout the period of the movement. Through this medium and otherwise, he enlarged upon the advantages of the plan, producing in its support a variety of facts obtained from time to time, urged resort to petitions, and circulated the requisite forms for the same, &c. Moreover, he was ever ready to give assistance in any form, and, in a word, worked as the committee's zealous agent, contributing not a little to the success of the movement. In short, the committee thus entered upon a course of vigorous action, which never flagged until its main purpose had been achieved; nor must I omit to say that Mr. Moffatt, its originator and chief worker, was ready on all subsequent occasions—and these were many—to answer any call for support; the aid thus given being often very acceptable and of great value.

Meanwhile the Parliamentary Committee, appointed on the motion of Mr. Wallace, began its sittings, the first being held on February 7th, the

cause at the same time receiving valuable support in petitions from various town councils and other bodies, some of which also referred in complimentary language to my lately-published letters to Lord Lichfield. Mr. Wallace, being appointed chairman, thenceforth concentrated his indefatigable efforts upon its work; and his labour during the whole session—his duties being by no means confined to the formal sittings—was most severe.

The committee sat no less than sixty-three days, and besides referring to “the Reports of the Finance Committee of 1797 and of sundry Commissions which had previously inquired into the management of the Post Office,” by which their labours were “much assisted,” they examined “the Postmaster-General, the secretaries and the solicitors of the three Post Offices of England, Ireland, and Scotland, and other officers of the Post Office department; obtained many important returns from the Post Office, most of which they directed to be prepared expressly for their use; and also examined the chairman, secretary and solicitor of the Board of Stamps and Taxes, Mr. Rowland Hill, and eighty-three other witnesses, of various occupations, professions, and trades, from various parts of the kingdom; in the selection of which they were much assisted by an association of bankers and merchants in London, formed expressly to aid the committee in the prosecution of their inquiry.”* This association, I scarcely need add, was the committee formed by Mr. Moffatt, and kept in vigorous action by his untiring efforts, aided by those of Mr. Ashurst and Mr. Cole.

The committee wisely directed its attention chiefly to the question of inland postage, which indeed offered abundant matter for investigation.

In speaking of the evidence given before this

* ‘Third Report of the Select Committee on Postage,’ p. 3.

committee, I follow not the order in which it was given, but the classification observed in the final Report; selecting, as the Report does, only those portions which bear most strongly on the questions to be resolved. My own evidence I shall in the main pass over, seeing that it was in substance almost identical with my pamphlet. My plan of "secondary distribution,"* however, I now thought it expedient to abandon, so far as regarded the existing range of post-office operations, not from any any doubt of its justice or intrinsic advantage, but with a view to simplify the great question before the committee.†

One question, of course, related to the varying rates of postage, which any one accustomed to present simplicity would find sufficiently perplexing. In Great Britain (for in Ireland it was somewhat different) the postage on a single letter delivered within eight miles of the office where it was posted was, as a general rule—consequent on a recent reduction—twopence, the lowest rate beyond that limit being fourpence. Beyond fifteen miles it became fivepence; after which it rose a penny at a time, but by irregular augmentation, to one shilling, the charge for three hundred miles; one penny more served for four hundred miles, and thenceforward augmentation went on at the same rate, each additional penny serving for another hundred miles. This plan of charge, with various complications arising out of it, produced remarkable anomalies, specimens of which are given in the evidence of Mr. Paul Measor, post-master of Exeter.

As if this complexity were not quite enough, there was as a general rule an additional charge of a halfpenny on a letter crossing the Scotch border; while

* 'See 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 12.

† See my letter to the Chairman of the Committee. First Report, p. 424.

letters to or from Ireland had to bear, in addition, packet rates, and rates for crossing the bridges over the Conway and the Menai; or, if they took the southern route, a rate chargeable at Milford.* Lastly, there was the rule already mentioned, by which a letter with the slightest enclosure incurred double postage, and with two enclosures triple; the postage, however, being regulated by weight whenever this reached an ounce, at which point the charge became quadruple; rising afterwards by a single postage for every additional quarter of an ounce.† Surely it is no wonder that Post Office officials, viewing prepayment in connection with such whimsical complexity, and probably thinking the connection indissoluble, should be hopeless of inducing the public to adopt the practice.

A second inquiry, which occupied much attention, referred to the number of chargeable letters then passing annually through the Office. The importance of this question, which no longer appears at first sight, was then so great that it was regarded as one of the main points at issue between the Post Office and myself.

Its importance arose thus. To estimate the increase in correspondence required for my purpose, it was obviously necessary to know the amount of loss per letter involved in the proposed reduction of postage; in other words, the difference between the proposed rate and the average of the rates actually paid, which average had therefore to be arrived at. This I placed at sixpence farthing, the Post Office authorities at a shilling. Actual knowledge, however, did not exist, and each party had resorted to calculation, dividing the gross revenue by the supposed number of letters. That number I then esti-

* 'Third Report from the Select Committee of Postage (1838),' p. 6.

† p. 43.

mated at eighty-eight millions,* the Post Office authoritatively declared it to be only forty-two or forty-three millions;† hence the difference in our results as to the actual average of postage, and consequently as to the required increase in correspondence, which I fixed at five-and-a-quarter-fold, the Post Office at twelvefold.

Of course it would have been easy for the Post Office authorities to correct their calculation, before the appointment of the committee, by an actual counting of letters; nor have I ever learned why this corrective was not applied. I had indeed to thank the department for obligingly supplying me with a fact essential to my calculation, viz., the number of letters, general and local, delivered in London in one week; and had this fact been dealt with by the Post Office as I myself dealt with it (a process, however, pronounced incorrect by the office),‡ the same result, or nearly so, must have been arrived at by both parties; but, as already intimated, had the counting process been applied to the whole country, as was afterwards done on the requisition of the committee, the whole question would have been settled at once.

Before my examination, however, I had been enabled, by the complaisance of the Postmaster-General, to obtain further information, chiefly as to the number of letters delivered and postage collected in Birmingham; and this had led me so far to modify my former estimate, as to reduce it to seventy-nine and a-half, or, in round numbers, to eighty millions.§ I may here add that yet further information, supplied on the requisition of the committee, enabling me to make yet further correction, I again reduced my estimate to seventy-eight millions.|| By the same

* 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 78. † 'Third Report,' p. 339.

‡ Speech of Lord Lichfield in House of Lords, November 30th, 1827.

§ 'Third Report,' p. 7.

|| p. 8.

time, the Post Office, having abandoned the statement so confidently put forth, had raised the number to fifty-eight and a quarter millions,* and this, after the counting mentioned above, it again advanced to seventy and a quarter millions.† The committee, after very elaborate calculations made by Mr. Warburton, fixed it at seventy-seven and a-half millions,‡ that is, ten and a-half millions below my first rough estimate, made on very limited information, and thirty-five and a-half millions above the authoritative statement of the Postmaster-General, made with all means of correction at command. The committee's conclusion as to the number of letters confirmed also my estimate as to the average single postage, viz., sixpence-farthing.§ It seems invidious, but I think it not superfluous, thus distinctly to report the result, since it may serve usefully to show, when other reforms are called for, in this or any other department, that official authority ought not imperiously to bear down conclusions arrived at by earnest, laborious, and careful investigation.

On the question as to the propriety of the existing rates, Colonel Maberly and other witnesses from the Post Office nearly all gave it as their opinion that these rates were too high, at once for the general interests of the public and also for that of the revenue. Indeed, Colonel Maberly believed that "every Postmaster-General had [so] thought them for many years."|| He did not, however, explain why this opinion, so generally entertained, had been so barren in result; and, indeed, when the Postmaster-General and the Secretary were interrogated by the committee as to any general or even specific abatements they might wish to recommend, no satisfactory reply could be obtained.

* 'Third Report,' p. 7.

§ *Ibid.*

† p. 8.

|| p. 12.

‡ p. 9.

The committee received much evidence, both as to the extent to which the law was evaded by the irregular conveyance of letters, and as to the evils produced by suppression of correspondence where circumstances rendered such evasion difficult or impracticable. Thus Mr. Parker and other publishers reported that it was a common practice, in their trade, to write a number of letters for different individuals in the same district, all on one sheet; and that this, on first coming to hand, was cut up into its several parts, each being delivered either by hand or through the local posts.* Mr. Dillon, of the firm of Morrison and Dillon, reported a similar practice, *mutatis mutandis*, in respect of money payments.† By other witnesses it was established that illicit correspondence was “carried on throughout the country, in systematic evasion of the law, if not in open violation of it, to an extent that could hardly have been imagined, and which it would be difficult to calculate;” this occurring “principally in the neighbourhood of large towns, and in populous manufacturing districts;” some carriers making it “their sole business to collect and distribute letters,” which they did “openly, without fear of the consequences; women and children” being “employed to collect the letters.”‡ Throughout one district the practice was “said to be universal, and was known to have been established there for nearly fifty years.”§ “The average number of letters thus sent daily throughout the year by a house in the neighbourhood of Walsall exceeded fifty, and by that house more than a hundred and twenty had been sent in one day.|| Not one fiftieth part of the letters from Walsall to the neighbouring towns was sent by post.”

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 12.

† Ibid.

‡ p. 13.

§ Ibid.

|| p. 13.

Mr. Cobden, as yet new to fame, but who had been deputed by the Chamber of Commerce at Manchester to give in evidence the results of inquiries instituted by them, reported thus—

‘The extent to which evasion is there practised is incredible; five-sixths of the letters from Manchester to London do not pass through the Post Office.’*

Similar evidence was received from Glasgow.† Mr. Brewin, of Cirencester, reported that—

‘The people in that town did not think of using the post for the conveyance of letters; he knew two carriers who carried four times as many letters as the mail did.’‡

Further evidence equally weighty and equally striking came in from other quarters.§ Various devices, now doubtless forgotten through disuse, were then in constant requisition; thus letters for travellers and others in the trade were habitually enclosed in the parcels sent by the great London booksellers to their customers in the provinces; similar use was made of warehousemen’s bales and parcels, and of boxes and trunks forwarded by carriers; as also of what were termed “free packets,” containing the patterns and correspondence of manufacturers, which the coach proprietors carried free of charge, except fourpence for booking. In the neighbourhood of Glasgow recourse was had to “weavers’ bags,” that is, bags containing work for the weavers, which the manufacturers forwarded to some neighbouring town, and of “family boxes,” farmers having sons at the University forwarding to them once or twice a week boxes containing provisions, and the neighbours making a Post Office of the farmer’s house.||

Colonel Maberly, however, did not attach much value to all this evidence, knowing “from long

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 13.

† Ibid.

‡ p. 14.

§ Ibid.

|| Ibid.

experience, when he was in Parliament, that merchants and interested parties are very apt to overstate their case," and his view was supported by some of his subordinates, though strongly contradicted by others, especially the Liverpool postmaster, Mr. Banning (the elder brother of the present officer), and the late solicitor to the General Post Office, Mr. Peacock, who "apprehends the illegal conveyance of letters to be carried to a very great extent at the present moment, and has no doubt that persons of respectability in the higher, as well as the humbler, walks of life, are in the habit of sending letters by illegal conveyance to a great extent."* The same general opinion was strongly expressed by Mr. Godby, the secretary to the Irish Post Office; as also by Mr. Thompson, its solicitor, who represented even the drivers and guards of the mail-coaches as constantly engaged in the illegal traffic.

In relation to letters going abroad the following is the summary of the evidence :—

‘The evasion of the postage on letters sent from different parts of the United Kingdom to the out-ports, for the purpose of being put on board of ships bound to foreign parts, especially to the United States of America, is yet more remarkable than the evasion of the inland postage. It is thoroughly known to the Post Office authorities; but the practice appears to be winked at. Colonel Maberly speaks of that practice as one known, and almost recognised.’†

Strong corroborative evidence was given by Mr. Banning, the postmaster of Liverpool; and the following curious fact was stated by another witness from the same great port, viz., Mr. Maury, president of the “American Chamber of Commerce.” When arrangements had been completed for the establishment of regular steam navigation between Liverpool and New York, Mr. Banning, expecting to have a

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 15.

† p. 17.

large despatch of letters to provide for, was careful, before the departure of the *Sirius*, the first of the new line of steamers, to furnish himself with a bag of ample dimensions, but, "to his astonishment, received only five letters in all," though "by that ship at least ten thousand letters were in fact sent, all in one bag, which was at the office of the consignee of the ship. Mr. Maury himself sent at least two hundred letters by that ship, which went free."*

These extraordinary statements were strongly supported by the evidence of Mr. Lawrence, Assistant Secretary to the London Office, who "states, that from what the Post Office have learnt, the American packet, which leaves London every ten days, carries 4000 letters, each voyage, which do not pass through the Post Office; that he is aware of the existence in London of receiving-houses for letters, to be forwarded otherwise than by the Post; the Jerusalem Coffee-house, for instance, receives letters for the East Indies; the North and South American Coffee-house, for South America, the United States, and British America; that almost every ship-broker in London has a bag hanging up for letters to be forwarded by the ship to which he is broker; and that the number of letters for North America so collected for several ships in the office of one ship-broker have been enough to load a cab."

Discoveries made by the Board of Customs, and duly reported to the Lords of the Treasury, led to the same conclusion as to the extensive smuggling of letters to out-ports.†

In fine, it appeared by various evidence that, with the opening of railways, the improvement and extension of steam navigation, and, indeed, with every addition to facilities for conveyance, the temptation

* 'Third Report,' p. 18.

† Ibid.

to "smuggling correspondence," and consequently the practice itself, increased and were likely to increase yet further.

In short, the committee came "to the conclusion that, with regard to large classes of the community, those principally to whom it is a matter of necessity to correspond on matters of business, and to whom also it is a matter of importance to save the expense of postage, the Post Office, instead of being viewed as it ought to be, and would be, under a wise administration of it, as an institution of ready and universal access, distributing equally to all, and with an open hand, the blessing of commerce and civilisation, is regarded by them as an establishment too expensive to be made use of, and as one with the employment of which they endeavour to dispense by every means in their power."*

They also became convinced that if it were possible, by increased rigour, to put a stop to the illicit transmission of letters, a vast diminution must take place in the number of letters written; and the suppression of correspondence already caused by high rates greatly magnified. One witness had "made a calculation some time ago among the poor manufacturers, and found when one of them in full work could earn forty shillings a week, he would receive, on an average, thirty orders, which at fourpence a piece, if they went through the Post Office, would be twenty-five per cent. on his earnings."†

While, however, illicit correspondence was found thus prevalent, there was abundant and striking evidence to show that "high rates of postage deter the public to a vast extent from writing letters and sending communications which otherwise they would write or send;" that "even those who have the means of evasion within their reach reduce their corre-

* 'Third Report,' p. 19.

† Ibid.

spondence greatly below the standard which, under other circumstances, they would think expedient;" that "suppression of correspondence on matters of business takes the place of evasion in proportion as the transactions to be announced or performed are moderate in amount, and the condition in life of the parties is humble."*

Were it not too tedious to enumerate even the heads under which suppression was deposed to, the reader, accustomed to the present state of things, would be astonished at the extent and variety to which movements would be restricted by a return to the old rates. Some few instances are all that can be noted. Who would now divine that high rates of postage could have any relation to the prevalence of small-pox? And yet it was found that "Practitioners and others in the country do not apply for lymph in the degree they otherwise would do to the institutions formed in London for the spread of vaccination, for fear of postage."

Again: "Sixpence," says Mr. Brewin, one of the Society of Friends, "is a third of a poor man's daily income; if a gentleman, whose fortune is a thousand pounds a year, or three pounds a day, had to pay one-third of his daily income, that is, a sovereign, for a letter, how often would he write letters of friendship?" * * * * "The people do not think of using the Post Office; it is barred against them by the very high charge."† "Mr. G. Henson, a working hosier from Nottingham, had given his wife instructions not to take letters in unless they came from particular persons; it would take half his income were he to pay postage."

The following statement, showing at once the desire and the inability of the poor to correspond, is taken from the evidence of Mr. Emery, Deputy-

* 'Third Report,' p. 20.

† p. 21.

Lieutenant for Somersetshire, and a Commissioner of Taxes :—

‘A person in my parish of the name of Rosser had a letter from a grand-daughter in London, and she could not take up the letter for want of the means. She was a pauper, receiving two-and-sixpence a week. * * * She told the Post Office keeper that she must wait until she had received the money from the relieving officer; she could never spare enough; and at last a lady gave her a shilling to get the letter, but the letter had been returned to London by the Post Office mistress. She never had the letter since. It came from her grand-daughter, who is in service in London.’*

Struck by this statement, Mr. Emery made further inquiries. The following statement he received from the postmaster of Banwell :—

‘My father kept the Post Office many years; he is lately dead; he used to trust poor people very often with letters; they generally could not pay the whole charge. He told me, indeed I know, he did lose many pounds by letting poor people have their letters. We sometimes return them to London in consequence of the inability of the persons to whom they are addressed raising the postage. We frequently keep them for weeks; and, where we know the parties, let them have them, taking the chance of getting our money. One poor woman once offered my sister a silver spoon to keep until she could raise the money; my sister did not take the spoon, and the woman came with the amount in a day or two and took up the letter. It came from her husband, who was confined for debt in prison; she had six children and was very badly off.’*

The following was reported by the postmaster of Congresbury :—

‘The price of a letter is a great tax on poor people. I sent one, charged eightpence, to a poor labouring man about a week ago; it came from his daughter; he first refused taking it, saying it would take a loaf of bread from his other children, but after hesitating a little time, he paid the money, and opened the letter. I seldom return letters of

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 21.

† p. 22.

this kind to Bristol, because I let the poor people have them, and take the chance of being paid; sometimes I lose the postage, but generally the poor people pay me by degrees.*

The postmaster of Yatton stated as follows:—

‘I have had a letter waiting lately from the husband of a poor woman, who is at work in Wales; the charge was ninepence; it lay many days, in consequence of her not being able to pay the postage. I at last trusted her with it.†

Mr. Cobden stated:—

‘We have fifty thousand in Manchester who are Irish, or the immediate descendants of Irish; and all the large towns in the neighbourhood contain a great many Irish, or the descendants of Irish, who are almost as much precluded, as though they lived in New South Wales, from all correspondence or communication with their relatives in Ireland.‡

As the postage between Manchester and most parts of Ireland was then about double the present postage (1869) from any part of England or Ireland to Australia, the separation between the Irish in Lancashire and their countrymen at home must then have been, postally considered, not only as great but about twice as great as is now that between the Irish at home and their friends at the Antipodes.

Of the desire of the poor to correspond, Mr. Emery gave further evidence, stating:—

‘That the poor near Bristol have signed a petition to Parliament for the reduction of the postage. He never saw greater enthusiasm in any public thing that was ever got up in the shape of a petition; they seemed all to enter into the thing as fully, and with as much feeling as it was possible, as a boon or godsend to them, that they should be able to correspond with their distant friends.§

There was much other evidence to the same general effect.

Much evidence was also given as to the extent of

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 22.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

§ p. 23.

moral evil caused by the suppression of correspondence. On this point Mr. Henson speaks again :—

‘When a man goes on the tramp, he must either take his family with him, perhaps one child in arms, or else the wife must be left behind ; and the misery I have known them to be in, from not knowing what has become of the husband, because they could not hear from him, has been extreme. Perhaps the man, receiving only sixpence, has never had the means, upon the whole line, of paying tenpence for a letter, to let his wife know where he was.’ *

Mr. Dunlop believed that—

‘One of the worst parts of the present system of heavy postage is, that it gradually estranges an absentee from his home and family, and tends to engender a neglect of the ties of blood, in fact, to encourage a selfish spirit ; at the same time he has known very affecting instances of families in extreme poverty making a sacrifice to obtain a letter from the Post Office.†

Mr. Brankston said :—

‘I have seen much of the evils resulting from the want of communication between parents and their children among the young persons in our establishment ; I find the want of communication with their parents by letter has led, in some instances, to vice and profligacy which might have been otherwise prevented.‡

It was also shown that one effect of suppression of correspondence was to keep working-men ignorant of the state of wages in different parts of the country, so that they did not know where labour was in demand. Thus Mr. Brewin said :—

‘We often see poor men travelling the country for work, and sometimes they come back, and it appears they have been in a wrong direction ; if the postage were low they would write first, and know whether they were likely to succeed.§

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 24.

† Ibid.

‡ p. 25.

§ Ibid.

Mr. Henson stated as follows:—

‘The Shoemakers’ Society at Nottingham tell me that 350 persons have come there for relief. * * * Very few of those persons would have gone upon tramp if they could have sent circular letters to a number of the largest towns in England at a penny to receive information whether a job could be got or not.’*

It may be observed that one of the main facts now urged in favour of Trades Unions is, that they collect and circulate the very information here spoken of as so much wanting.

There was evidence to show that the difficulty of communication aggravated—

‘The remarkable pertinacity of the poor to continue in their own parish, rather than remove to another where their condition would be bettered.’†

It was also stated that—

‘The consequence of the high rates, in preventing the working-classes from having intercourse by letter, is, that those who learned at school to write a copy have lost their ability to do so.’‡

Mr. G. Henson adds that—

‘There are many persons, who, when he first knew them wrote an excellent hand, but now, from their scarcely ever practising, they write very badly: one of these persons is so much out of the habit of writing that he would as soon do a day’s work, he says, as write a letter: they are so much out of the habit of writing that they lose the art altogether.’§

Mr. Davidson, of Glasgow, thought—

‘That additional opportunities of correspondence would lead the industrious classes, the working-classes, to pay more attention to the education of their children than they do now, and that it would have a highly beneficial effect, both upon their moral and intellectual character.’||

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 25.

† p. 26.

‡ Ibid.

§ Ibid.

|| p. 27.

So strong was the sense entertained by some of the witnesses of the evils inflicted on society by imposing a tax upon postage that they expressed their doubts whether it were a fit subject for taxation at all. Mr. Samuel Jones Loyd (now Lord Overstone), said :—

‘I think if there be any one subject which ought not to have been selected as a subject of taxation it is that of intercommunication by post; and I would even go a step further, and say, that if there be any one thing which the Government ought, consistently with its great duties to the public, to do gratuitously, it is the carriage of letters. We build national galleries, and furnish them with pictures; we propose to create public walks, for the air and health and exercise of the community, at the general cost of the country. I do not think that either of those, useful and valuable as they are to the community, and fit as they are for Government to sanction, are more conducive to the moral and social advancement of the community than the facility of intercourse by post. I therefore greatly regret that the post was ever taken as a field for taxation, and should be very glad to find that, consistently with the general interests of the revenue, which the Government has to watch over, they can effect any reduction in the total amount so received, or any reduction in the charges, without diminishing the total amount.’*

Mr., afterwards Sir William, Brown, and also Lord Ashburton, strongly supported this opinion, the latter saying :—

‘The communication of letters by persons living at a distance is the same as a communication by word of mouth between persons living in the same town. You might as well tax words spoken upon the Royal Exchange, as the communications of various persons living in Manchester, Liverpool, and London. You cannot do it without checking very essentially the disposition to communicate.’†

I pause here in my narrative to bar an inference that might very naturally be drawn from my citing the above passages, viz., that in my opinion even the present rates constitute a tax, and may therefore be

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 27.

† p. 28.

wisely and justly abandoned in favour of lower ones, or indeed of absolutely free conveyance. Certainly, if it could be shown that some other corporation could and would manage the whole correspondence, with all its numerous and extensive rootlets and ramifications, on lower terms than the Government, and this without any sacrifice in speed or certainty, then the difference between such lower rates and the present might fairly be termed a tax; but I am not aware that such capability has yet been conceived, still less seriously maintained; and indeed I cannot but believe that, taking the duty as a whole, the Post Office, so long as it is well managed, is likely to do the work on better terms than any rival institution.

Another opinion erroneously attributed to me, and connected with the above, is, that so long as the department thrives as a whole its funds may justly be applied to maintain special services which do not repay their own cost; whereas, from the first, I have held that every division of the service should be at least self-supporting,* though I allowed that, for the sake of simplicity, extensions might be made where there was no immediate expectation of absolute profit.† All beyond this I have always regarded as contrary to the true principles of free trade, as swerving into the unsound and dangerous practice of protection.

Whenever, therefore, it is thought that the net revenue from the Post Office is too high for the interests of the public, I would advise the application of the surplus to the multiplication of facilities in those districts in which, through the extent of their correspondence, such revenue is produced.

To return to the evidence. With regard to the amount of reduction that it would be expedient to make, the witnesses generally, whether from the Post

* 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 55.

† Ibid.

Office or otherwise, were of opinion that it must be large; illicit conveyance having become too firmly established to be effectually dealt with by any moderate change. The Secretary indeed, was of opinion—

‘That to whatever extent the postage is reduced, those who have hitherto evaded it will continue to evade it, since it cannot be reduced to that price that smugglers will not compete with the Post Office, at an immense profit.’*

Mr. Peacock, while of opinion that nothing would entirely prevent illicit transmission, said that the only means he knew of to check it was to reduce the postage rates.†

It has already been shown that a very important, indeed essential, part of my plan was uniformity of rate. To this various objections were raised, some of which would now seem frivolous enough. As an instance, I may mention the statement—

‘That in certain cases extra rates are levied, and are applicable to the maintenance of certain roads and bridges, undertaken with a view to expedite the mails which travel over them.’‡

An objection the more frivolous as the total amount of the rates thus levied was less than 8,000/.

Some witnesses from the Post Office regarded the uniform rate as “unfair in principle.”§ Dr. Lardner, while he regarded it as abstractedly unjust, yet thought it should be recommended on account of its simplicity. All the other witnesses were in its favour, provided the rate were as low as one penny; and nearly all considered a uniform rate preferable to a varying one, though the rate should somewhat exceed one penny.||

Mr. Jones Loyd observed that the—

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 29.

† Ibid.
|| Ibid.

‡ p. 33.

§ p. 34.

‘Justice of the uniform plan is perfectly obvious. You are not warranted in varying the charge to different individuals, except upon the ground that the cost of conveyance varies; so far as that varies the charge ought to vary; but it appears to me that that which consists of a tax upon individuals ought to have no reference to the place of their residence; it should either be equal, or, if it varies at all, it should be in proportion to their means of bearing the tax.’

Being asked whether, if a uniform rate of twopence were imposed on all letters, and if a person at Limerick got his letters for twopence, a person at Barnet would not soon find out that he ought to have his letters for a penny, Mr. Loyd answered:—

‘If such be the fact, he would soon find it out, I presume; if it was not the fact, of course he would never find it out.’*

Mr. Dillon made the following remarkable statement:—

‘To show how little the cost of transit sometimes enters into the price of goods, I may mention to the committee, in the way of illustration, that we buy goods in Manchester; they are conveyed to London; we sell them in London very often to dealers resident in Manchester, who again carry them back to the place from whence they came, and, after the cost of two transits, they will have bought them of us cheaper than they themselves could have bought them in Manchester. In this instance, the cost of transit, as an element of price, has become absolutely destroyed by the force of capital and other arrangements.’†

Lord Ashburton also approved the principle of a uniform rate, and Colonel Colby termed it “just and convenient.”‡ Colonel Maberly would like a uniform rate of postage, but did not think it practicable. “Any arrangements which, in the great details of Post Office matters, introduce simplicity, he looks upon as a great improvement.”§ Most of the other Post Office authorities liked the idea of a

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 34.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

§ Ibid.

uniform rate, as "it would very much facilitate all the operations of the Post Office," but the Superintending President of the London Inland Office differed from the other witnesses, asserting "that it is quite as easy to make twenty different taxes [of letters] as to make them all the same."*

The feasibility of payment in advance, now the almost universal practice, was the subject of much inquiry. Most of the witnesses from the Post Office recognised the advantage of the arrangement, though some of them doubted its practicability. Part of this difficulty, it must be admitted, was, in some sort, of my own creating; for, perceiving that the costly system of accounting rendered necessary by payment on delivery could never be entirely set aside unless prepayment became universal, my first notion had been to make this compulsory; and though, to smooth the difficulties, I recommended that in the outset an option should be allowed, that, namely, which exists at present, I certainly looked upon this as but a temporary expedient, and both desired and expected that the period of probation might be short. Doubtless it was a mistake, though a very natural one, so to clog my plan; my aim, however, was not merely to establish a pleasing symmetry, but to attain an important practical end.

The Postmaster-General and the Secretary were both of opinion that the public would not like prepayment. Being called on to reply to objections on this point, I showed that the question for the public to determine was between prepayment at a low rate and post payment at a high rate; and I ventured to predict that, when so considered, the objection to prepayment would speedily die away; the more so as the difference proposed to be made between the two modes of payment, viz., that between one penny and

* 'Third Report,' p. 35.

twopence, was not adopted “as an artificial means of enforcing prepayment,” but arose “out of the greater economy to the Post Office of the one arrangement as compared with the other.” Nearly twenty other witnesses were examined on the same point, all supporting my view, some going so far as to advise that compulsory prepayment should be established at once; and, indeed, the ease with which prepayment became the general, nay almost universal custom, must make it seem wonderful that its adoption should ever have been considered as presenting serious difficulties.

Supposing prepayment to be resolved on, the question remained as to the mode in which such payment could be most conveniently and safely made; and this inquiry of course brought the use of stamps into full discussion. It must be remembered that in proposing by this plan to supersede the multitudinous accounts then kept in the department, my object had been not merely to save expense, but to prevent loss through negligence or by fraud. In relation to this, the committee found important evidence in the Eighteenth Report of the Commissioners of Revenue Enquiry, already referred to; as appears by the following extracts given in the report of the committee:—

‘Upon the taxation of letters in the evening there is no check.

‘The species of control which is exercised over the deputy postmasters is little more than nominal.’

Upon this unsatisfactory state of things it appeared by the evidence of the Accountant-General of the Post Office that very little improvement had been made since the issue of the Commissioners’ Report.

Another matter of anxiety relative to the use of stamps was the risk of their forgery; and on this point Mr. John Wood, the Chairman of the Board of Stamps and Taxes, together with other officers of the

department, was examined at considerable length; Mr. Wood wished to superadd to the use of stamps that of some paper of peculiar manufacture, forgery being more difficult when it requires the combined talents of the engraver, the printer and the paper-maker. Specimens of such a paper had been laid before the committee by Mr. Dickinson, and such a paper, with lines of thread or silk stretched through it, Mr. Wood regarded as the best preventive of forgery he had ever seen. I scarcely need say that this is the paper which was subsequently used in the stamped envelope, though its use was afterwards abandoned as unnecessary.

The Post Office opinions as to the use of stamps for the purpose of prepayment were, on the whole, favourable; though the Secretary was of opinion that, as regards time, labour, and expenditure at the General Post Office, the saving would not be so great as “Mr. Hill in his pamphlet seemed to think it would.”* He enumerated nine classes of letters to which he thought stamps would be inapplicable.

The task of replying to these objections was easy, on some points ludicrously so; thus solemn reference was made to the class of letters which not having found the party addressed had been returned through the Dead Letter Office to the sender. The additional postage so caused could not be prepaid in stamps. Of course not, but luckily no such postage had ever been charged.†

Another class of letters presenting a difficulty (here I am careful to quote the exact words) “would be half-ounce letters weighing an ounce or above.” I could not but admit that letters exhibiting so remarkable a peculiarity might present difficulties with which I was not prepared to deal.‡

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 41.

† ‘Second Report,’ question 11,110.

‡ 11,111.

“The ninth class,” said the Secretary, “is packets improperly sent through the Post Office. You may send anything now if you pay the postage.”

What could be more obvious than the answer? I gave it as follows: “The fact is, you may send anything now, whether you pay the postage or not.”*

But the Secretary continued, “The committee is aware that there is no prohibition as to what description of packets persons should put into the Post Office; the only protection to the Post Office at present is the postage that would be charged on such packets.”†

My answer was easy: “The fact is, that the ‘only protection’ is no protection at all. The Post Office may charge, certainly, but it cannot oblige any one to pay; and the fact of there being a deduction in the Finance Accounts for 1837, amounting to 122,000*l.* for refused, missent, and redirected letters, and so forth, shows that the Post Office is put to a considerable expense, for which it obtains no remuneration whatever.”

Among the advantages claimed for the proposed use of stamps was the moral benefit of the arrangement; and this was strongly urged by Sir William Brown, who had seen the demoralising effect arising from intrusting young men with money to pay the postage, which, under the existing arrangement, his house was frequently obliged to do.‡ His view was supported by other witnesses.

It seems strange now that it should ever have been thought necessary to inquire gravely into the expediency of substituting a simple charge by weight for the complicated arrangement already mentioned; but this was by no means deemed superfluous at the

* ‘Second Report,’ question 11,112.

† Ibid.

‡ ‘Third Report,’ p. 42.

time. The innovation, being stoutly resisted, had to be justified, and evidence was taken accordingly. Lord Ashburton being called on for his opinion, thought that the mode in use was “a hard mode, an unjust mode, and vexatious in its execution.”*

On the other hand, though Colonel Maberly admitted the frequent recurrence of mistakes, which indeed it must have been impracticable to avoid, viz., “that a great number of letters are charged as double and treble which are not so, and give rise to returns of postage,”† and though Sir Edward Lees thought “that charging by weight would, to a certain extent, prevent letters being stolen in their passage through the Post Office,”‡ yet the Assistant Secretary, the Superintending President, and one of the Presidents of the Inland Office, together with most of the other witnesses from the Post Office, were unfavourable to taxing by weight. The Superintending President described an experiment made at the office, from which he concluded that a greater number of letters could be taxed in a given time on the plan then in use, than by charging them in proportion to the weight of each letter. The value of this test was pretty well shown by the fact that in this experiment the weighing was not by the proposed half-ounce, but by the *quarter*-ounce scale, and that nearly every letter was put into the scale unless its weight was palpable to the hand.§

The probable effect of the adoption of my plan on the expenditure of the Post Office department was a question likely to elicit opposite opinions. It was to be considered, for instance, whether the staff then employed in the London Inland Office, viz., four hundred and five persons,|| would suffice for that increase of correspondence on which I counted; or

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 43.

† Ibid.

‡ p. 44.

§ ‘First Report,’ questions 1369, 1372.

|| ‘Third Report,’ p. 45.

whether, again, supposing the increase not to be attained, it would, through economy of arrangement, admit of serious reduction. On these questions* there was much difference of opinion, even within the office. Thus, while one high official stated that payment in advance, even though it occasioned no increase of letters, would not enable the Post Office to dispense with a single clerk or messenger,† another, viz., Mr. Lawrence, although declaring that he spoke with great caution, as not being practical enough to make a distinct statement, was of opinion that four times the number of letters might be undertaken by the present number of hands.‡

Again, as to the sufficiency of the existing means of conveyance, the Superintendent of the Mail-coaches, after stating “that a mail-coach would carry of mail fifteen hundredweight, or one thousand six hundred and eighty pounds, represented that if the letters were increased to the extent assumed, the present mail-coaches would be unable to carry them;”§ while Colonel Colby stated that the first circumstance which drew his attention to the cheapening of postage was that in travelling all over the kingdom, particularly towards the extremities, he had “observed that the mails and carriages which contained the letters formed a very stupendous machinery for the conveyance of a very small weight; that in fact, if the correspondence had been doubled or trebled, or quadrupled, it could not have affected the expense of conveyance.”||

To determine the question the committee directed a return to be made of the weight of the mail actually carried by the several mail-coaches going out of London. The average was found to be only 463 pounds,¶ or little more than a quarter of the weight

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 45.

† p. 46.

‡ p. 47.

§ p. 48.

|| Ibid.

¶ p. 49.

which, according to Post Office evidence, a mail-coach would carry; and as it appeared, by other evidence, that the chargeable letters must form less than one-tenth of the weight of the whole mail, it was calculated by the committee that, with every allowance for additional weight of bags, the average weight of the chargeable letters might be increased twenty-four fold before the limit of 1680 pounds would be reached. It was further shown that the weight of all the chargeable letters contained in the thirty-two mails leaving London was but 1456 pounds; that is, less than the weight which, a single mail-coach could carry.*

Finally, on the general question of economy to be expected from the adoption of my plan, Lord Ashburton deposed as follows:—

‘The opinion I have expressed with respect to the present high rate of postage is an opinion I have always entertained; but I was much struck with the statement of Mr. Hill upon the subject. I thought the uniformity of the rate of postage, and the plan of stamping covers, and the plan of not making any addition for moderate-sized letters, were very good and very desirable; also, I was much struck with the great facility in the delivery of letters, arising from the deliverer having no money to collect upon the delivery, and the great means of simplifying the whole transactions of the Post Office by transferring the money part of it principally to the Stamp Office, and taking away from it nearly the whole of its functions as a board for the collection of the revenue.’†

Though the amount to be recommended as the uniform rate was of course a question for the consideration of the committee, yet, as my plan fixed it at one penny, most of the witnesses assumed this as the contemplated change; making it the basis of their estimates, and counting upon this low rate for turning into the regular channel of the post various communications then habitually made by other means, such,

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 50.

† Ibid.

for instance, as small orders, letters of advice, remittances, policies of insurance, and letters enclosing patterns and samples, all of which were, for the most part, diverted into irregular channels by excess of postage. Similar expectations were held out with respect to letters between country attorneys and their London agents, documents connected with magisterial and county jurisdiction, and with various local trusts and commissions, for the management of sewers, harbours, and roads, and of schools and charities, together with notices of meetings and elections to be held by joint stock and proprietary bodies.* The mere enumeration will surprise the reader of the present day, accustomed as he must be to send and receive all such communications by the post alone. Nor will it seem less strange to learn that at that time the post had little to do with the circulation of prices current, catalogues of sales, prospectuses, circulars, and other documents issued by public institutions for the promotion of religion, literature, science, public instruction, or other philanthropic or charitable ends; all of which, so far as they could then be circulated at all, were obliged to find their way through channels more or less irregular.†

The committee, however, “also took evidence as to the increase that was to be expected in the posted correspondence of the country from the adoption of a uniform rate of twopence;” but on this basis they found that much greater diversity of opinion prevailed. Some important witnesses, however, with Lord Ashburton at their head, “were, for the sake of protecting the revenue, favourable to a plan founded on a twopenny rate.”‡

While, however, Lord Ashburton thought the reduction to twopence, rather than to a penny, safer as regards the direct revenue of the Post Office, he

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 52.

† p. 53.

‡ p. 54.

was strong in his opinion that reduction of postage would act beneficially on the general revenue of the country, saying that there was "no item of revenue from the reduction of which he should anticipate more benefit than he would from the reduction of postage;" and adding that "if, under any plan of reduction, you did not find an improvement in the Post Office revenue, you would find considerable benefit in every other way."*

Although it was obvious that the establishment of a low rate of postage would of itself have a strong tendency to the disuse of the franking privilege, the committee had to consider how far it might be desirable to retain that privilege at all. It was found that the yearly number of franked missives was about seven millions; that those franked by members of parliament, somewhat less than five millions in number, might be counted nearly as double letters, the official franks (about two millions in number) as eightfold letters, and the copies of the statutes, distributed by public authority (about seventy-seven thousand in number), as thirteen-fold letters.†

In respect of the official franks, indeed, supposing their contents to be always in genuine relation to the public service, there was a mere formal difference between their passing through the Post Office free, and their being charged to the office of state from which they were posted; but such a supposition would have been very wide of the truth, for, as is justly remarked in the Report, "it is liable to the abuse, which no vigilance can effectually guard against, of being made the vehicle for private correspondence." The Report continues:—

‘Thus it appears from Dr. Lardner’s evidence, that while he resided in Dublin, the greater part, if not the whole, of his correspondence was allowed to pass under the franks of the

* ‘Third Report,’ p. 56.

† p. 60.

then Postmaster-General for Ireland, and that the extensive correspondence in which he is now engaged, in relation to various publications, and to engineering, on which he is professionally consulted, is carried on principally by means of official franks. He states, that as these franks enable him to send any weight he pleases, he is in the habit, in order to save trouble to those from whom he obtains the franks, of enclosing under one cover a bundle of letters to the same neighbourhood.*

However the objection to the existence of such opportunities might be lessened in the particular case by the uses to which it was applied, there was clearly no ground for supposing that it was only for such laudable purposes that the privilege was employed; indeed, it was notorious that men of science were far from being the class principally indulged. Neither could it be the poor and humble to whom the favour was commonly extended, but, as alleged by Mr. Brankston, one of the witnesses, it was "principally the rich and independent who endeavoured to obtain franks from those who are privileged to give them." Dr. Lardner, too, said that "a man to obtain such advantages as he obtains must be a person known to or connected with the aristocratic classes of society."†

Besides considering my plan, the committee had to deal with various other suggestions, the principal of these being "a graduated scale of reduced rates, commencing with twopence, and extending up to twelpence, tantamount, as was stated, in England, to a reduction of threepence per letter, which was laid before the committee by Colonel Maberly." The loss to the revenue from such reduction he estimated at from seven to eight hundred thousand pounds a year.‡

None of these plans, however, except one for charging the rates according to geographical distance,

* 'Third Report,' p. 60.

† p. 61.

‡ p. 63.

were approved of by any of the witnesses unconnected with the Post Office.

As regards the importance of increased facilities in reference alike to the convenience of the public and the restoration of the revenue, upon which I had laid such stress, but which unfortunately were so tardily adopted, much confirmatory evidence came alike from the Post Office and from other quarters. Thus Colonel Maberly reported that "the impression at the Post Office is, as a general principle, and it is, in point of fact, almost always found, as a general rule, that increased accommodation produces an increased quantity of letters."* The postmaster of Liverpool and Sir William Brown both laid great stress on quickness of despatch;† and it appeared, by a return, that the simple fact of conveying the Manchester and Liverpool mail by railway instead of by coach had, in the course of three years, raised the receipts on letters passing between those towns from less than thirteen thousand pounds to nearly seventeen thousand, or about thirty-one per cent.‡

Mr. Willock, the postmaster of Manchester, stated that "letters have, in numerous instances, been sent in coach parcels, not so much with a view to save postage as to facilitate transmission, and to insure early delivery. This happens," he stated, "very much in those neighbourhoods in which there is not direct communication through the medium of the Post Office, especially in a populous and manufacturing district between twenty and thirty miles from Manchester."§ In confirmation of the latter remark, Mr. Cobden stated that in the village of Sabden, twenty-eight miles from Manchester, where his print-works were, although there was a population of

* 'Third Report,' p. 64.

† Ibid.

‡ p. 65.

§ Ibid.

twelve thousand souls, there was no Post Office, nor anything that served for one.

Such are a few of the multitudinous statements made to the committee, in reply to questions, nearly twelve thousand in number, addressed to the various witnesses. The recital throws at least some light upon the difficulties by which the way to postal reform was beset, showing how necessary it was then to strengthen points which now seem quite unassailable, to prove what now seems self-evident, to induce acceptance of what no one now would hear of abandoning.

If further illustration of such necessity be needed, it may be found in the following extracts from the evidence of Post Office officials:—

The Assistant Secretary:—

‘Question 986. I think there are quite as many letters written now as there would be even if the postage were reduced [to one penny].’*

It having been stated that the time for posting letters at the London receiving offices had been extended from 5 to 6 P.M., Mr. Holgate, President of the Inland Office, is examined as follows:—

‘Question 1586. *Chairman.* Has any notice of that been conveyed to the public?—I should be very sorry if any had.

‘1587. How long has that been [the practice]?—The last three months.

‘1588. Why should you regret that being made public?—They would reach us so much later, and throw so much upon the last half-hour in the evening.

‘1589. That is the time when the office is most pressed by business?—Yes.

‘1590. *Mr. Currie* [a member of the committee]. In fact, the office has given the public an accommodation which the office is anxious that the public should not profit by?†

* * * * *

‘1655. If Mr. Hill’s plan were carried into effect, I do not

* ‘First Report,’ p. 79.

† p. 106.

think that any tradesmen could be got to receive letters [*i.e.*, to keep a receiving house] under 100*l.* a year.*

The Postmaster-General :—

‘Question 2821. He [Mr. Hill] anticipates only an increase of five and a quarter-fold [to make up the gross revenue]; it will require twelve-fold on our calculation. * * * Therefore it comes to that point, which is right and which is wrong: I maintain that our calculations are more likely to be right than his.†

It may be remarked here that the old gross revenue was rather more than made up in the year 1851, the increase of letters being then only four and three-quarters-fold.‡

My own examination occupied a considerable portion of six several days, my task being not only to state and enforce my own views, but to reply to objections raised by such of the Post Office authorities as were against the proposed reform. This category comprised, with the exception of Mr. Peacock, the solicitor, all the highest officials in the chief office; and however unfortunate their opposition, and however galling I felt it at the time, I must admit on retrospect that, passing over the question of means employed, their resistance to my bold innovation was very natural. Its adoption must have been dreaded by men of routine, as involving, or seeming to involve, a total derangement of proceeding—an overthrow of established order; while the immediate loss of revenue—inevitable from the manner in which alone the change could then be introduced (all gradual or limited reform having by that time been condemned by the public voice), a loss, moreover, greatly exaggerated in the minds of those who could not or did not see the means direct and indirect of its recuperation, must naturally have alarmed the appointed guardians

* ‘First Report,’ p. 109.

† p. 189.

‡ ‘First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General,’ pp. 65, 68.

of this branch of the national income. If, as the evidence proceeded, they began to question the wisdom of their original decision, they probably thought, at the same time, that the die was now cast, their course taken, and all that remained was to maintain their ground as best they could. The nature and extent of Post Office resistance, much as has appeared already, is most conspicuous in the following extracts, the last I shall make, from the Digest of Evidence, in which are summed up the opinions put forth by the Secretary; opinions from which, so far as I am aware, he never receded:—

‘He considers the whole scheme of Mr. Hill as utterly fallacious; he thought so from the first moment he read the pamphlet of Mr. Hill; and his opinion of the plan was formed long before the evidence was given before the committee. The plan appears to him a most preposterous one, utterly unsupported by facts, and resting entirely on assumption. Every experiment in the way of reduction which has been made by the Post Office has shown its fallacy; for every reduction whatever leads to a loss of revenue, in the first instance: if the reduction be small, the revenue recovers itself; but if the rates were to be reduced to a penny, the revenue would not recover itself for forty or fifty years.’

The divisions on the two most important of the resolutions submitted to the Commission, and, indeed, the ultimate result of their deliberations, show that no effort made in support of right views had been superfluous.

Thus, on a motion made on July 17th by Mr. Warburton to recommend the establishment of a uniform rate of inland postage between one post town and another, the Committee was equally divided; the “ayes” being Mr. Warburton, Lord Lowther, Mr. Raikes Currie, and Mr. Chalmers; the “noes,” the three members of Government, Mr. P. Thomson, Lord Seymour, and Mr. Parker, with Mr. Thornley,

M.P. for Wolverhampton; so that the motion was affirmed only by the casting vote of the Chairman.*

Mr. Warburton further moving:—

‘That it is the opinion of this committee, that upon any large reduction being made in the rates of inland postage, it would be expedient to adopt an uniform rate of one penny per half-ounce, without regard to distance,’—

the motion was rejected by six to three; the “ayes” being Mr. Warburton, Mr. Raikes Currie, and Mr. Morgan J. O’Connell; and the “noes” the same as before, with the addition of Lord Lowther and Mr. G. W. Wood; and upon Mr. Warburton, when thus far defeated, moving to recommend a uniform postage of three halfpence, the motion was again lost by six to four, the only change being that Mr. Chalmers, who appears to have been absent during the second division, now again voted with the ayes.†

The second day, however, Mr. Warburton returned to the charge, moving to recommend a uniform rate of twopence the half-ounce, increasing at the rate of one penny for each additional half-ounce; a motion met, not by the direct negative, as before, but by an amendment more than tantamount to this. On this question, as also on that of uniformity, the committee was equally divided, the opponents to the proposed reforms losing Lord Lowther, who now voted in its favour, and the supporters remaining as before, save that Mr. Villiers, who had been absent at the previous divisions, took the place of Mr. Morgan John O’Connell. Again, therefore, the motion was affirmed only by the casting vote of the Chairman.‡ The passing of the two resolutions, however—one to recommend a uniform rate of inland postage irrespective of distance, and the other to fix the single rate at twopence—was decisive as to the committee’s course, as will appear

* ‘Third Report,’ p. iv.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

by the sequel. We must return for a time to the rejected amendment.

This had been moved by Mr. P. Thomson, and the substance of it was to abandon the recommendation of a uniform rate and to consider instead a Report proposed by Lord Seymour, the chief points of which were to recommend the maintenance of the charge by distance and the establishment of a rate varying from one penny, for distances under fifteen miles, to one shilling for distances above two hundred miles, or of some similar scale. *This, it must be observed, would have been adopted as the recommendation of the committee but for the casting vote of the Chairman, Mr. Wallace.* To what extent so untoward a circumstance would have retarded the cause of postal reform it would be difficult now even to conjecture; but it cannot be doubted that the success, which, even with the support of the committee, was so hardly achieved, would at least have undergone long and injurious delay.

To make this clear, it must be observed that by the adoption of Lord Seymour's draft Report (a copy of which I have before me) not only the recommendations for uniformity and decided reduction of postage would have been set aside, but also those for increased facilities, for the general use of stamps, and for charge by weight instead of number of enclosures.

Lord Seymour's Report, however, though so unsatisfactory in its recommendations, and, according to my view, very erroneous in its reasonings on many points, more especially in its main argumentation, viz. that against uniformity, yet contained passages of great value at the time, as confirming my statements, and, more or less, directly supporting my views; particularly as regards the evils which high rates of postage brought upon the poor, the vast extent of illicit conveyance, the evils of the frank system, and even many of the advantages of a uniform charge.

Doubtless, could the recommendations contained in this Report have been voluntarily adopted by the Post Office only two years before, almost every one of them would have been received as a grace; but it was now too late, their sum total being altogether too slight to make any approach towards satisfying the expectations which had subsequently arisen, as the sequel will abundantly show.

Before quite leaving Lord Seymour's Report, I must, in candour, admit that on one point his prediction was truer than my own, though, as my own remained unpublished, I was not committed to it. The following is the passage:—

‘It appears that the great change which must result from the substitution of railways for mails [mail-coaches] will have the effect of increasing considerably the cost of conveying the correspondence of the country.’

In my copy of this draft Report (given to me, I suppose, by Mr. Wallace) I find the following remark in my own handwriting:—

‘No such thing. One railway stands in place of several common roads.’

The implied inference, viz., that the cheaper operation of railways would lower the cost of conveying the mails seemed justified by the moderation of the charges for this service made up to that time by the railway companies. The event, however, has contradicted my contradiction, the railway charges for conveying the mails, contrary to the rates for passengers and goods, being higher, weight for weight, than those on the old mail roads.

The committee having thus decided the two great points of uniformity of rate and a twopenny charge for the single letter, Mr. Wallace, with his usual kindness, immediately wrote to inform me of the

result. He was the more careful to do this because, as he knew, it was not in full accordance with my wish, the rate recommended being higher than that which I regarded as desirable; and, what was worse, such as to make strict uniformity impracticable; since reservation would have to be made in favour of the local penny rates then in existence, which could not be raised without exciting overpowering dissatisfaction.

To return to the committee: only one further attempt was made to modify their resolutions, viz. this was a motion made at the next meeting by Lord Seymour, in the following words:—

‘That it is the opinion of this committee that an increase of general post letters under an uniform rate of twopence, to the extent which will be required to sustain the gross revenue of the Post Office, will occasion a considerable addition to the cost of the establishment.’

This motion, however, was negatived by six to three; the only noticeable variety being that Mr. Thornley, who, though always my personal friend, had hitherto voted with my opponents, now voted in favour of the proposed reforms.

After this day the members of Government ceased their attendance, save only that Lord Seymour once reappeared during the consideration of the Report, though there is no record to show what part he, or, indeed, any one else, took on that day. Opposition being thus abandoned, proceedings of course went on rapidly, so that at the next meeting, viz., on July 25th, the whole of the remaining resolutions, more than twenty in number, and several of them of considerable length, were all carried; the Chairman being requested also to draw up a Report in conformity therewith.

As the proceedings of the committee approached

their close, Mr. Wallace requested that I would undertake to prepare a draft Report for his consideration, previously to its being submitted to the Committee. From this I naturally shrank; but, upon further urgency, I so far consented as to select so much of the evidence as seemed most necessary for the purpose, cutting it out from the reports just as it stood, in question and answer, but classifying it under some twenty different heads. This, according to my recollection, we placed in Mr. Wallace's hands, and upon it he wrote a Report. Report writing, however, was not his forte, especially when it had to be performed in haste, and amidst the distraction of other necessary business, so that the document produced was not such as would have answered any useful purpose. Whether it still exists in MS. I do not know, but I believe it never was printed. Under these circumstances, with Mr. Wallace's full consent, my brother Frederic undertook the task, and produced the Report laid before the committee.

This, as shown by the minutes, took place on July 31st, and the draft was considered on four several days; the last being August the 11th, when it was formally agreed to. I must here mention, however, that though this Report became the basis of that finally issued, it was by no means the same document, having been re-arranged, in great measure re-written, and greatly added to, during the recess. Of this more hereafter.

Thus closed, for the present, the work of this memorable committee, on whose decision rested consequences, not only of the deepest interest to myself, but, as afterwards appeared, of importance to the whole civilised world. Seldom, I believe, has any committee worked harder, or conferred greater benefit by its labours. I must add that Mr. Wallace's exertions were unsparing, his toil incessant, and his zeal

in the cause as unflagging as if the profit and the reputation were to be all his own.

My own convictions in relation to the committee and its chairman were corroborated by the following strong passage in the *Times*.

‘Altogether we regard the Post Office Inquiry as one conducted with more honesty and more industry than any ever brought before a committee of the House of Commons.’*

Perhaps, before proceeding to other matters, I may, without invidiousness, make one more remark in reference to the proceedings of this committee. It is not unknown that since the successful establishment of penny postage, there have appeared other claimants to its authorship. As regards Mr. Wallace, enough has been said to show that he was not of the number; though of late some persons, trusting perhaps to imperfect recollections, have advanced such claims in his name. As regards other claimants, it is most remarkable that throughout this period of contest, when no less than eighty-seven witnesses deposed in favour of the measure, and when all solid information and every weighty opinion were so valuable, they gave no evidence, remained unheard, and, so far as has ever appeared, entirely silent. General Colby, indeed, on whose behalf some such claim has been advanced since his death, did give evidence, but without the least reference to further discoveries by himself than has been already mentioned; and I may add, that though he honoured me with his friendship to the time of his death, he never even alluded to the claim in question. Indeed, all the claims of which the public has lately heard are of very recent date, having arisen long since the success of penny postage became indisputable.

The Report adopted at the last meeting of the

* *Times*, May 31, 1839.

committee was placed in the hands of Mr. Warburton, by agreement (well understood though unrecorded), for revision ; a work to which he forthwith applied himself with untiring zeal, referring occasionally to me for some detail of information, or for the verification of some calculation. I had therefore frequent occasion to call on Mr. Warburton, and I may add that such occasions recurred from time to time almost up to the period of his death. On first entering his house, I was shown into the dining-room, and in all my subsequent visits I was received in the same apartment. I well remember the appearance of things—an appearance which never varied from first to last. What first struck me was that the room never could be used according to its name ; the table, indeed, stood out in full length, sufficient for a respectable number of guests, but it was wholly occupied with piles of books, and those not of the most digestible kind, consisting almost entirely of such as in passing through the Post Office are marked *Par. Pro.* and are known to all the world as “blue books.” The sideboard was similarly heaped, save that a little room was left for astronomical instruments, Mr. Warburton being an able mathematician, and indeed a frequent contributor to a Cambridge scientific journal, numbers of which he would occasionally lend me, though, unfortunately, I found much of their contents beyond my range. The chairs, save one, bore each its parliamentary load, and similar lumber occupied the floor ; passages only, and those narrow ones, being left between the paper walls. There were, however, one or two books of lighter kind ; but even these seemed insensible of change. On an early visit, I laid hands on a number of the ‘*Edinburgh Review*,’ containing one of Macaulay’s brilliant articles, I think that on Lord Bacon ; and as the book always remained exactly where I laid it down, I found op-

portunity of reading, bit by bit, the whole essay. The one chair already mentioned, and a small table near it, were alone unencumbered with books, and alone free from the dust which, in every other part of the room, seemed to have on it the repose of years. What the rest of the house might be made of, I cannot say; it was sufficient for me that its owner always afforded me zealous support, and gave practical evidence of sincere and earnest friendship.

Meanwhile, having but inferential knowledge as to the progress of the work, and thinking it very important that no time should be lost in publishing the Report, since I hoped it might be advantageously dealt with in the newspapers during the recess, I felt, though I was careful to conceal, a certain degree of impatience at what I supposed must prove but laborious refinement on that which already appeared sufficiently good, a feeling more than fully shared in by Mr. Wallace, who in the course of the autumn wrote to me, in earnest protest against the delay, his expressions growing stronger as time advanced, until on December 1st he went so far as to predict that, if the Report were withheld during the holidays, penny postage would not be carried out during the next year. He even begged that his letters might be kept as vouchers of his anxiety on the subject. Eventually, however, it became clear enough that no time had really been lost, the delay being more than atoned for by the excellence of the result.

Meanwhile, too, the press, not awaiting the appearance of the Report, began to urge action by reference to what was already known. The *Times*, in particular, during the months of November and December, repeatedly wrote in strong support of my plan, as the following extracts abundantly show.

After stating the leading features of the plan of penny postage, the *Times* says:—

'Here is a plan, then, as clear and simple as can well be imagined, and which the mind, almost without an effort, can follow into its minutest details.

* * * * *

'Such, and so strong appear to us the arguments by which the proposed change of system is recommended, on whichever side it may be viewed, that it only requires to be inquired into and fully understood to be carried by the universal consent of Government and people. To cause it to be thoroughly understood must necessarily be a work of time, and also, as involving a change of habits and associations—a work of some difficulty; but the end cannot be uncertain.' (*Times*, November 22nd, 1838.)

'There would seem, in ordinary cases, sufficient grounds for the abandonment of any system attached to, and forming part of, any civilised age or country, that it was proved to be injurious to the temporal interests of the community, a bar to its intellectual progress, and destructive alike of morals and happiness, and that it could be changed for another involving little risk of loss, with the fair, though distant, prospect of immensely increased profits.' (*Times*, December 5th, 1838.)

'How, then, it will perhaps be asked, is any Post Office, as a Government department, to go on at all so as to yield any revenue? The answer is, that it must do the work as low as individuals can do it, and that, joined with the greater regularity and security which the present machinery imparts to it, will keep it in operation. The evidence collected by the Committee of the House of Commons has satisfactorily shown that this may be done at the low rate suggested by Mr. Hill, and, in all probability, with a very great increase of the Post Office revenue. After the disclosures made, what have the Post Office people to expect if they do not adopt that course? Nothing less than that every large town in the kingdom, the metropolis included, will have its organised arrangements for the conveyance of letters by private hands, and drive them out of the trade altogether.

* * * * *

'Now will any man of plain understanding deny, after reading this, that if it were desired to ingraft trickery and deceit on the character and every day practice of the whole trading part of the community, no mode could possibly be

so effectual as the present Post Office system.' (*Times*, December 8th, 1838.)

As I have already mentioned the more important events occurring between the prorogation of Parliament in August and the end of the year 1838, it will be seen that, so far as postal affairs were concerned, this was to me a period of comparative rest, though even then scarcely a week or perhaps even a day passed without their making some call on my attention. Of course, too, my duties at the Australian Commission remained undiminished, or rather indeed increased with the increasing flow of emigration, and the difficulties already arising in the colony. However, I was again able to breathe, and to prepare for those new anxieties which I knew must be in the future. When would the Report appear? What effect would it produce on the country? Would there be such a movement as would sufficiently influence ministers and Parliament? To me, of course, these were questions of the deepest interest, and though, for the time, the main work was, as it were, taken off my hands (since the process which I had been fortunate enough to initiate must be looked to for bringing the movement to its next stage), yet it was necessary to keep watch, to be ready for assistance when called for, to deal with almost innumerable communications, and to pay respectful attention to many suggestions, especially, of course, to such as came from earnest supporters of the cause. So closed the year 1838.

CHAPTER IV.

PENNY POSTAGE BILL.

THE first notable circumstance in 1839 was the receipt of a letter from Sir William Brown, written from Washington, and informing me of an interview which he had had with the Postmaster-General of the United States on the subject of my pamphlet, and the parliamentary proceedings relative thereto. The Postmaster-General told him that my pamphlet had given him a great deal of information, that it was the intention of the United States Government to remodel the Post Office laws in the next session of Congress, and that he thought five cents for all distances would be a postage sufficient to cover expenses. This sum, I may here remark, was afterwards adopted, though subsequently the charge was yet further reduced. Sir William gave it as his own opinion that the action of the American Government would materially assist the movement at home. Three weeks later, however, he expressed some distrust of the Postmaster-General, describing him, not much to my information, as a "loco foco," and advising me to write to the Hon. Mr. Kennedy, who was very desirous of moving in the matter, and to whom it was wished that I should send the reports, pamphlets, &c., bearing upon the subject. In writing to this gentleman, I expressed an opinion that on account of the great extent of territory and the sparseness of population in the United States, penny

postage might not be so applicable to that country as to England ; but added, that as the American people did not look to their Post Office for revenue, I thought the general rate, if not reduced so far as a penny, might yet be a low one.

The Report so laboriously prepared by Mr. Warburton appeared, I believe, early in March, the first notice I find of the event being in the 'Spectator' newspaper (No. 558) of the 9th of that month; the number containing, in a "second edition," the whole of the Report, though omitting some of the notes, and the "Abstract of Evidence" appended thereto. This last part of the blue book, so far as it goes (for unfortunately the abstract is incomplete), materially aids any one wishing to arrive at the facts of the case.

Of this Report (the third of the Committee of 1838) I forbear to give even a summary; not only because this would involve the repetition of much that has been already said, but because I have no hope whatever of doing justice to so very able and interesting a document, the result of many months of hard labour, the very model of a Report, and which, as such, as well as because of the valuable information which it contains, will even now amply repay the trouble of perusal. It is invaluable as an authoritative record of a state of things so absurdly strange as to be now almost incredible, but which was nevertheless justified and upheld at the time by many able and excellent men. Moreover, its elaborate calculations, which I was called upon to check, put some of the most important questions at issue in a clear, striking, and often even amusing light.

It may be added that on all important points it gave to my statements and conclusions the sanction of its powerful authority. Nevertheless, as the committee had determined on the recommendation of a twopenny rate, the Report had to be framed in, at least, formal

accordance with this fact ; though both Mr. Wallace, in whose name it went to the committee, and Mr. Warburton, by whom it was actually drawn, were strongly in favour of the penny rate. A careful perusal of the document, however, will show that, though the twopenny rate is formally recommended, the penny rate is the one really suggested for adoption. In this sense it was understood by the public, and to my knowledge it was wished that it should be so understood.

It only remained to see what effect this masterly Report would have on the country, the Parliament, and the Government. As respects the first, enough has been mentioned to justify good expectation ; the same might be said in less degree of the second ; but of the third, all indications were as yet adverse.

On the 12th of April appeared, in some of the London papers, as afterwards in the 'Post Circular,' a letter which I had felt called upon to write in reply to an article in the Supplement to McCulloch's 'Commercial Dictionary,' then lately published, extracts from which had appeared in some of the papers. Mr. McCulloch's opposition came very unexpectedly, since he had previously been a decided supporter of the general plan ; his name having appeared amongst the select signatures to the important London petition presented to Parliament in the year 1837, and already mentioned at page 126 of this history. He had likewise supported the cause in the *Courier* newspaper, resented the delay in adopting my plan, had, in conversation with myself, pronounced Ministers "a set of dawmn'd fools," and threatened to expose them in the 'Edinburgh Review.' The only circumstance to which I could attribute his change of opinion was that he had recently been appointed head of the Stationery Department : we all know, and I myself have been

charged with such experience, that questions often assume a new aspect when viewed from the windows of a Government office. It would be superfluous to detail here, either Mr. McCulloch's grounds of objection, or my reply, experience having set the question absolutely at rest.

Meanwhile, meetings were taking place in various towns to petition in favour of penny postage, strong articles on the same side appeared in the *Times*, the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Post*, and various other papers; and Mr. Wallace, as chairman of the late committee, received so many letters on the subject of the movement, as to be under the necessity of publicly acknowledging them *en masse*, mentioning, by way of instance, that on the single day of writing he had received nine written communications in reference to various petitions, together with eight newspapers.

The Post Office, too, began to show signs of uneasiness, and made a few very cautious reductions; lowering, for instance, the postage between London and Keswick from thirteen pence to a shilling, and granting similar indulgence on London letters to twenty-one other places; the amount of reduction being in each instance the same, or, as the 'Post Circular' put it, not *to* a penny, but *by* a penny.

On March 23rd a somewhat remarkable scene occurred in the House of Commons; Mr. Scholefield having presented a petition from Birmingham, for which he was member, the Speaker desired all honourable members who had petitions to present on Penny Postage to bring them up; when instantly a great number of members on both sides of the House "advanced in a crowd to present them, amidst cheering on all sides." It may be added that the petitions on the subject in the course of six days amounted to two hundred and fifteen.

The number of the 'Post Circular' from which I have taken this account (No. 12) contains also one of those amusing devices with which my friend, Mr. Henry Cole, knew so well how to strike the public eye. Probably the reader will not be displeased at its reproduction. The Edinburgh mail-coach, it will be seen, is depicted, with its guard, coachman, and two outside passengers; the letter



Great weight and no price! Little weight and all price!!

bags, which, as all the world knows, or then knew, usually occupied the hind boot, so as to lie under the guard's foot, are by an artistic liberty placed on the roof, the whole being arranged in divisions of franks, newspapers, Stamp-office parcels, and chargeable letters; the first three (which are free of postage) occupy the whole roof, the last lying in small space on the top of one of the bulky

divisions, the proportions being those of the mail conveyed on March 2nd, 1838. The legend below sums up the tale.

Of the depth and extent of public feeling by this time aroused, further evidence appears in the following extracts from the *Examiner* and the *Times*':—

‘On no subject within our recollection has there been so general an agreement, as upon Mr. Hill’s plan for a penny postage.*

‘Such is the degree of conviction which is carried to all who have bestowed any thought upon it, that the only question is—and it is asked universally—will these ministers have the honesty and courage to try it? On a review of the public feeling which it has called forth, from men of all parties, sects, and conditions of life, it may well be termed the cause of the whole people of the United Kingdom, against the small coterie of place-holders in St. Martin’s-le-Grand, and its dependencies.’†

That these journals did not stand alone, is shown by a general list in the ‘Post Circular,’ of newspapers known to have taken the same side. Though probably incomplete, it contains the names of twenty-five London papers (nine daily and sixteen weekly), and of eighty-seven provincial papers. It must be remembered, too, that, as already shown, the number of journals, especially of country journals, was then comparatively small.

While public feeling was thus manifesting itself at home, I received further evidence of attention excited abroad, Mr. Hume sending me a pamphlet written by M. Piron, then second in authority in the Post Office of France, advocating reduction of postage, and speaking of my plan in very flattering terms.

* *Examiner*, April 27, 1839.

† *Times*, March 16, 1839.

The rate recommended by M. Piron was twenty centimes the quarter-ounce, or, setting aside the difference of weight, nearly the same as that previously recommended here by the Parliamentary Committee. M. Piron, I may here remark, continued to press his views on the French Government (at one time I was assured to his own injury) till my plan, in a modified form, was adopted by the Revolutionary Government of 1848. I may also mention here that, soon after the receipt of Mr. Hume's communication, I had a letter from Dr. (now Sir John) Bowring, dated Berlin, and informing me that our proceedings were exciting much interest in that part of the world.

Now, however, came the crowning proof of the hold which the plan had taken of the public mind. On May 3rd, Lord Melbourne received a deputation on the subject, in which were comprised about one hundred and fifty members of Parliament, chiefly, if not exclusively, supporters of Government. The principal speaker was Mr. Warburton, his most telling passage being as follows :—

‘If he might be pardoned for making the observation upon such an occasion, he would say it would be a concession so wise, that it would be well calculated to make any Government justly popular, *and he would strongly urge it as a measure which a Liberal party had a just right to expect from a Liberal administration.*’

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He was followed by Mr. Travers, a leading member of the Mercantile Committee, and a man well-known and highly influential in the City.

Next came Sir John Campbell, then Attorney-General, and who I need not say afterwards attained the highest legal position in the state.

After a short speech from Mr. Mark Phillips, M.P.

for Manchester, Mr. O'Connell, mounting on a chair in a distant part of the room, spoke as follows:—

‘One word for Ireland, my lord. My poor countrymen do not smuggle, for the high postage works a total prohibition to them. They are too poor to find out secondary conveyances, and if you shut the Post Office to them, which you do now, you shut out warm hearts and generous affections from home, kindred, and friends. Consider, my lord, that a letter to Ireland and the answer back would cost thousands upon thousands of my poor and affectionate countrymen considerably more than a fifth of their week's wages; and let any gentleman here ask himself what would be the influence upon his correspondence if, for every letter he wrote, he or his family had to pay one-fifth of a week's income.’

Next came Mr. Hume; his voice, as that of the watchful guardian of the national finances, carrying unusual weight; since it was notorious that he would be the last man to recommend any improvident course.

Not the least remarkable speech, the concluding one, was that of Mr. Moffatt, who undertook, if Government shrank from the risk of the proposed reduction, to form a City company which should take the Post Office entirely off their hands, guaranteeing to the State the same amount of revenue as before.

Lord Melbourne's reply, though reserved, was courteous and encouraging. He recognised the importance of the deputation, acknowledged the weight of the facts produced, and while he withheld all present announcement as to the course to be adopted by Government, promised that the whole matter should receive prompt and earnest attention.

‘A strong feeling evidently pervaded the room in reference to Mr. Warburton's allusion to the just expectation of this important measure being conceded by a Liberal Government. HE WAS THEN LOUDLY CHEERED.’*

* *Morning Chronicle*, May 3, 1839.

So remarkable a deputation could not but produce a great effect. Mr. Warburton's hint, though guarded, was, as I learnt, well understood, and I was afterwards assured that this proceeding was the very turning-point of the movement; the Government having thereon decided to adopt the measure. Certainly, but three weeks later, viz., on May 22nd, I received the following letter from Mr. Warburton:—

May 22, 1839.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have just learnt from Mr. Bannerman, who has it from Lords Melbourne and Duncannon, that the penny postage is to be granted.

I shall see Lord M. and Lord J. R. on Sunday.

Dear Sir,

Yours truly,

HENRY WARBURTON.

ROWLAND HILL, Esq.

Three days later I again heard from Mr. Warburton, as follows:—

May 25, 1839.

MY DEAR SIR,

Mr. Parker, the Treasury Lord, last night, and Lord John Russell, this morning, confirmed to me the intentions of the Government to propose your plan; and I believe that they will announce publicly their intentions to that effect on Tuesday.

I shall take an opportunity of expressing my opinion to Lord Melbourne that you ought to be employed to superintend the execution of the plan. If you have anything to say to me on the subject, call before half-past 10 o'clock to-morrow.

Yours,

HENRY WARBURTON.

ROWLAND HILL, Esq.

Of course, the recommendation that I should be employed had in my view a double importance; agreeing not only with my own natural and ardent desire, but also with the inevitable conviction that if

by the alternative course, the management of my plan were committed to the hands of its avowed and persistent opponents, men who manifestly viewed it not only with dislike but with scorn, and whose predictions would be falsified if it attained success, it would have small chance of receiving that earnest and zealous attention, watchful care, and constant effort for effectual development combined with strict economy, on which I knew the desired result must depend.

For convenience I mention here that after the passing of the Postage Bill, Mr. Wallace wrote to Lord Melbourne to the same effect.

His letter is but a specimen of Mr. Wallace's general course in my regard. He makes no reference to his own valuable labours, but only urges claims for me, based on the importance of my discovery.

To return to my narrative, as the intentions of Government could not remain entirely secret, a meeting appointed for May 31st, and for which the use of the Egyptian Hall had been granted by the Lord Mayor, was postponed to July 10th, and in fact never took place; for, six days later, Mr. Warburton, having in the House asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Government intended to proceed with a twopenny or penny rate, Lord John Russell replied that the intention of Government was to propose a resolution in favour of a uniform penny postage, remarking, "the plan will be in conformity with that which has been proposed by the committee as likely to be the most beneficial one," and adding that, though the scheme would necessarily involve many months of preparation, no time should be lost.* Having been apprised of Mr. Warburton's intention, I was present

* This passage also is entirely omitted in 'Hansard,' but is recorded partly in the 'Post Circular,' No. 14, p. 59; and partly in the 'Mirror of Parliament,' vol. xxxviii. p. 2578.

when the announcement was made; and I leave the reader to imagine the deep gratification I felt at thus seeing expectation turned into certainty.

Probably from want of due report, the Duke of Richmond—though, as already shown, much interested on the subject—remained ignorant of what had occurred; for three days later, in presenting petitions “from a great many places in favour of uniform penny postage,” he hoped that if Government reduced postage at all, they would adopt Mr. Rowland Hill’s plan, and not that of the Committee of the House of Commons.

The Duke’s recommendation, I need not say, found a warm seconder in my own heart, and though the point on which his thoughts must have mainly turned, viz., the preference of a penny rate to a twopenny one, had been conceded by Government, grave doubts yet remained as to the adoption of my plan in its entirety; and here my first anxiety was as to the introduction of stamps; their use, as already shown, being indispensable to that rapidity and economy of postal operation, without which the mere adoption of the penny rate would be extremely imperfect as a matter of public convenience, and perhaps seriously detrimental to the direct revenue. I consequently prepared a paper, which was printed and circulated by the Mercantile Committee, ‘On the Collection of Postage by means of Stamps.’ Of this it will suffice to say here that it describes in considerable detail the plan of which the first bare suggestion had been given, as already shown, early in 1837. I will only mention that I had to describe envelopes and adhesive stamps now so familiar to all, the one as “the little bags called envelopes,” and the other as “small stamped detached labels—say about an inch square—which, if prepared with a glutinous wash on the back, may be attached without

a wafer.” I must admit, however, that, as the paper shows, I still looked upon stamped covers or envelopes as the means which the public would most commonly employ; still believing that the adhesive stamp would be reserved for exceptional cases.

Unfortunately, the recommendations contained in my paper were not acted upon until the Government had resorted to other supposed expedients, which turned out to be real impediments, and were not got rid of without much trouble.

Meantime, on June 25th, Lord Radnor, in presenting forty petitions in favour of uniform penny postage, repeated Mr. Warburton’s question as to the intentions of Government, and received from Lord Melbourne the assurance that the Chancellor of the Exchequer would shortly bring the matter forward;* his words were as follows:—

‘Undoubtedly it is the intention of the Government to carry into effect the plan referred to by my noble friend—considering how it has been recommended, the strong interest it has excited, and the benefits and advantages which unquestionably belong to it—with all practicable speed.’†

In my anxiety to obtain for the proposed measure a favourable reception in the House of Commons, I drew up with great care a short paper, entitled ‘*Facts and Estimates as to the Increase of Letters,*’ which was printed by the Mercantile Committee, a copy being sent to every member of Parliament. Of this paper, probably, no copy now remains save the one or two reserved by myself. It would be convenient to pass it over, and as, to the best of my belief, it was never after referred to, either by supporter or opponent, it would seem reasonable to suppose that either the impression made by it must have had little to do with the decision of the House, or

* ‘*Mirror of Parliament,*’ vol. xxxviii. p. 3298.

† *Ibid.*

that the result of the measure was generally regarded as sufficient confirmation of its contents. Truth, however, requires that it should be recalled from oblivion. Upon looking back to the time, I feel that I must have been unduly influenced by the evidence proceeding from the general public in support of my recommendations; that I did not make sufficient allowance for the influence of desire upon judgment, nor remember that where real knowledge is unattainable, conjecture naturally goes to the utmost extent that reason can seem to justify. In short, though the predictions then put forth are now doubly fulfilled, I must acknowledge that the fulfilment was by no means so easy or so rapid as to equal the expectation I then entertained and held out to others. At the same time, large allowance must be made for the then unexpected and most untoward fact that the working of my plan was, as regards all direct action, committed to those who were almost pledged to its failure.

About the time that this paper was issued, opposition arose in so strange a quarter, that if the reader were invited to conjecture, he could scarcely go right save by considering how best he could go wrong. If it had been inquired what trade was most likely to benefit by the multiplication of letters, surely the one selected would have been the trade in paper. Nevertheless, a deputation of stationers went up to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, setting forth that they and their brethren would be put to great inconvenience by the adoption of Mr. Rowland Hill's plan. Probably the motive to this whimsical proceeding was an apprehension that the issue by Government of stamped envelopes would deprive the petitioners of an expected trade; the fear of this making them blind to the far more than counterbalancing advantage to be derived from the multipli-

cation of what envelopes were intended to contain. However I must not omit to mention that, some months afterwards, when I was in office, I had a very satisfactory interview with these same gentlemen at the Treasury.

The deputation to the Chancellor of the Exchequer was said at the time to have been favourably received, but no very notable effect seems to have been produced. At all events, on July 5th, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in bringing forward his Budget, proposed the adoption of uniform penny postage. After having dwelt upon the fact that there had been of late a large increase of expenditure, due partly to improved administration in home affairs, partly to the establishment of ocean steamers for the conveyance of the mails, and the employment for the same purpose of railway trains instead of mail-coaches, partly to the increase of the National Debt by the borrowing of the twenty millions used in the redemption of negro slavery, partly also to increase in the means of defence, and lastly, to the recent insurrection in Canada, he observed that, as through these various circumstances there was little or no spare revenue, it would be necessary that the Government, in yielding to the general wish for the adoption of penny postage—a measure imperilling a revenue of a million and a half—must be assured of the concurrence of the House in the adoption of such means as might be necessary for making good any deficiency that might arise; he himself expecting that in the outset such deficiency would be very great. After having stated that, on some points he differed from the conclusions of the committee, he proceeded to eulogise their labours in the following terms:—

‘I must admit that a committee which took more pains to inform itself, whose collection of evidence is more valuable, as giving the opinions of many of the most intelligent persons

of all classes in the country, I never remember in my Parliamentary experience.’*

In reference to the popular demand for the measure, he made the following remarkable declaration :—

‘I find that the mass of them [the petitions] present the most extraordinary combination I ever saw of representations to one purpose from all classes, unswayed by any political motives whatever; from persons of all shades of opinion, political and religious; from clergymen of the Established Church, and from all classes of Protestant Dissenters; from the clergymen of Scotland, from the commercial and trading communities in all parts of the kingdom.’†

Judiciously thinking that it would be better for the House to leave the details of the measure in the hands of Government, he demanded for the Treasury the power at once of fixing the rates of postage, of ordering payment by weight, of making prepayment compulsory and of establishing the use of stamps. He concluded by moving the following Resolution :—

‘That it is expedient to reduce the postage on letters to one uniform rate of a penny postage, according to a certain amount of weight to be determined; that the Parliamentary privilege of franking should be abolished; and that official franking be strictly limited—the House pledging itself to make good any deficiency that may occur in the revenue from such reduction of the postage.’‡

Such opposition as was made was directed rather against the pledge required of the House than against the plan of penny postage, and on that point Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Goulbourn were supported by some members on the Liberal side of the House, including Mr. Hume, who regarded such pledge as superfluous, seeing that the House was at all times

* ‘Hansard,’ 3rd series, vol. xlviii. p. 1360.

† p. 1361.

‡ p. 1365.

bound to maintain the national income, and who also thought that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's estimate of deficiency was excessive, he himself believing that though there might be a serious deficiency the first, and even the second year, it was probable that as by that time the plan would be in full operation, the future deficiency would not be greater than Mr. Hill had allowed for.

All, however, concurred in the opinion that if the experiment were to be made the penny rate was to be preferred to any other; and while Mr. Goulbourn said that he should have been much in favour of the measure were there but a surplus to justify the risk, Sir Robert Peel went so far as to say—

‘That he should have thought it sufficient, if Government had maturely considered the details of this measure, had calculated the probable loss to the revenue, and had come forward to propose, in this acknowledged deficiency of the public revenue, some substitute to compensate the public. He should have thought that sufficient. So convinced was he of the moral and social advantages that would result from the removal of all restrictions on the free communication by letter, that he should have willingly consented to the proposition.’*

It was very noticeable at the time that, after citing the strongly condemnatory opinions of Colonel Maberly and Lord Lichfield, Sir Robert Peel remarked, “I do not say that these opinions convince me.”†

The Resolution was agreed to without division.

A week later, the Chancellor of the Exchequer having moved that the Report on the Postage Acts be received, Mr. Goulbourn, who might be regarded as the Chancellor of the Exchequer expectant, moved resolutions of which the object was to have the measure of penny postage postponed, on the ground,

* ‘Hansard,’ 3rd series, vol. xlviii. p. 1387.

† ‘Mirror of Parliament,’ vol. xxxviii. p. 3695.

mainly, of the present deficiency in the revenue, the extensive powers proposed to be given to the Treasury, and the opposition of the paper-makers.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in reply, pointed out several recent instances of partial reduction in postage rates which had been followed, speedily, by an increase of revenue; taunted the opposition members with altered tactics since the last debate, and challenged them to a direct vote against penny postage.

Sir Robert Peel repeated the arguments of Mr. Goulbourn, and again urged objections to the pledge to make good any loss of revenue.

After speeches from Mr. Poulett Thomson, Mr. Warburton, and Lord Sandon in favour of the measure, the House divided, when the "ayes" were 215, and the "noes" 113, giving a majority of 102 in favour of penny postage.*

Those who frequented the House of Commons thirty years ago will remember the two doorkeepers of the day. Mr. Pratt, a somewhat tall and grave personage, and Mr. Williams, a chubby red-faced man, who seemed as if he escaped bursting only by the relief he found in laughing at the exuberance of his own humour. Both these men were zealous friends of penny postage, took every opportunity to inquire or report progress, and, in the warmth of their friendship, always went at least as far as duty permitted, in enabling me to attend the discussions on postal matters. On the night when the above important division took place their excitement was prodigious. During the debate I had sat under the gallery, but on the division had, of course, to withdraw. As I passed into the outer lobby, the inner being required in the division, and used, as it happened, to receive the supporters of the measure, my two friends

* 'Hansard,' vol. xlix. pp. 277-307.

warned me to keep near the door, that they might let me know how things went on. I took my station accordingly, and ever and anon was informed through the grating in the door, the flap being for the moment withdrawn, as to accession of number. Report became more and more satisfactory, Williams's eager face beaming at each momentary glimpse with increased gratification: "All right," "Going on capitally," "Sure of a majority," were given out in succession, until the climax was reached by his whispering audibly, amidst laughter which he strove in vain to control, "Why, here's old Sibby come out;" and certainly when I learnt that Colonel Sibthorpe, the Tory of Tories, was amongst the supporters of my plan, I could not but feel that the game was won.

The measure was now considered secure so far as related to the House of Commons, but people had not yet forgotten the warning given by the ejaculation so common seven or eight years before, "Thank God there's a House of Lords;" and anxiety began to arise as to the reception which the measure might experience in the Upper House. Promptly therefore the Mercantile Committee directed its attention that way, and appointed certain of its members as a deputation to wait upon a few of the more influential peers. In executing this mission, the deputation naturally sought an interview with the Duke of Wellington; their application, however, receiving the following characteristic reply:—

London, July 16, 1839.

THE Duke of Wellington presents his compliments to Mr. Moffatt.

The Duke does not fill any political office. He is not in the habit of discussing public affairs in private, and he declines to receive the visits of deputations or individuals for the purpose of such discussions.

If, as a Member of Parliament, any gentleman or com-

mittee should wish to give the Duke information, or the benefit of their opinion, he is always ready to receive the same in writing, but he declines to waste their time and his own by asking any gentleman to come to this distant part of the town to discuss a question upon which he would decline to deliver his opinion, excepting in his place in Parliament.

Moreover the Duke, although not in political office, has much public business to occupy his time, and on Thursday in particular, the day named by Mr. Moffatt, he will be occupied by attendance upon the Naval and Military Commission during the whole of the forenoon, until the meeting of the House of Parliament of which he is a member.

Being thus disappointed of an interview, the deputation requested me to undertake the duty of addressing the Duke by letter; and, after carefully considering the topics most likely to influence his Grace, I wrote as follows:—

Bayswater, July 22, 1839.

MY LORD DUKE,

At the request of the Mercantile Committee on Postage, I have the honour to submit for your Grace's consideration a few facts in support of the Bill for the establishment of a uniform penny postage, which it is expected will shortly be brought into the House of Lords.

The evidence which has been given before the Select Committee on Postage proves that the Post Office revenue has scarcely increased at all for the last twenty-four years.

That the present high rates lead all classes, except those allowed to frank, to evade postage to an enormous extent.

That they cause a vast amount of correspondence, mercantile as well as domestic, to be actually suppressed, thus crippling trade and preventing friendly intercourse.

That if postage were reduced to one penny the revenue would be more likely to gain than to suffer.

That the *present* average cost to the Post Office of distributing letters is $\frac{3}{4}d.$ each, and that this cost would be greatly reduced under the proposed arrangements.

That the cost to the Post Office is frequently greater for short distances of six or eight miles than for long distances of two or three hundred miles; thus showing the unfairness of the present varying charges.

And that the partial reductions in postage rates hitherto made have, after a short time, invariably benefited the revenue.

I have taken the liberty of enclosing a short abstract of the Report of the Select Committee on Postage, which has been drawn up by the Mercantile Committee, as well as some ‘Facts and Estimates as to the Increase of Letters,’ prepared by myself, to which I respectfully solicit your Grace’s attention.

The boldness, yet safety of the proposed change, its simplicity and its tendency to extend commerce, science, and education, will, I confidently hope, recommend it to your Grace’s favourable consideration.

I have, &c.,

ROWLAND HILL.

To His Grace the DUKE OF WELLINGTON,
&c. &c. &c.

To this letter I received no reply; indeed, as appears on the face of it, I was careful so to frame it as to show that none was expected; but the letter appears to have had its effect, for when the debate came on, the Duke, as will be seen hereafter, distinctly supported the measure.

Meanwhile the bill for establishing penny postage was brought in by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord John Russell, and Mr. F. Baring; and passed the first reading without discussion.*

The second reading took place on the 22nd July, after a debate in which Mr. Goulbourn, Sir Robert Inglis, and Sir Robert Peel attacked, and Mr. Francis Baring, Lord Seymour, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Wallace, and Mr. Warburton defended the bill. The attack was founded chiefly on the large powers granted to the Treasury, though Sir R. Peel, while admitting “that a great reduction of postage might be made, not only without injury, but with great advantage to the revenue,” thought, however, “that it would be better to make a partial re-

* ‘Hansard,’ vol. xlix. p. 494.

duction of the postage duties than to repeal them almost entirely, as is now proposed," and considered "that the advantages to be derived from such a proposition are much overrated."* Sir Robert Inglis also objected to the abolition of the Parliamentary privilege of franking, stating incidentally, that to some mercantile houses it was worth 300*l.* a year, and thus explaining the desire of others for penny postage, as being nearly equivalent to franking; but Sir Robert Inglis's objection was overruled by Sir Robert Peel, who strongly urged the importance of abolishing the privilege in question, adding that if each Government department were required to pay its own postage much would be done towards checking abuse. He also advised that 'Parliamentary Proceedings' should be subjected to a moderate postage charge; and it is scarcely necessary to add that Sir Robert Peel's advice on this point was followed.†

The bill was read without a division.

On the following day the public anxiety relative to the House of Lords showed itself in a petition "signed by the Mayor and upwards of twelve thousand five hundred of the merchants of the City of London, which the Noble Lord who presented the petition understood had been signed in twelve hours," praying that no temporary deficiency of revenue might delay the establishment of penny postage.‡

As this, though not by any means the last petition presented, is the last requiring notice, it may not be amiss to mention here that the number of petitions presented to Parliament in favour of penny postage during the single session of 1839 was upwards of two thousand; the number of appended signatures

* 'Mirror of Parliament,' vol. xxxviii. p. 4171.

† 'Hansard,' vol. xlix. pp. 623-641.

‡ p. 687.

being about a quarter of a million; while as many of the petitions proceeded from Town Councils, Chambers of Commerce, and other such Corporations, a single signature in many instances represented a considerable number of persons.

The bill having passed rapidly through all but the third reading, the only remaining fear was lest a feeling of security should produce dangerous neglect at the last stage. To guard against this the Mercantile Committee issued a circular to such members as were in favour of the measure, urging them to make a House. On July the 29th the bill was read a third time and passed, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announcing, in reply to Sir Robert Peel, that Government had not yet determined on the precise mode in which the measure should be introduced.*

Before following the bill to the Upper House I will mention a circumstance which, however trifling in itself, may derive some interest from its connection with a body so much the "observed of all observers" as the House of Commons.

One night, when a discussion on Post Office affairs was to come on, I was sitting under the gallery when one of the members suggested to me that I should go up-stairs and get some refreshment; a hint of which, after some hesitation as to the propriety of intruding, I gladly availed myself. Acting on direction there received, I went to "the Kitchen," where the usual processes of boiling and roasting were actively going forward. Upon my request for tea a wooden tray was brought out, and being first supplied with the requisites for the meal, was handed to me. Suspecting that my subjection to the necessity of carrying this apparatus to the refreshment-room might arise from my being regarded as an intruder, I watched the motions of such as came by un-

* 'Hansard,' vol. xlix. p. 936.

questionable right. Scarcely had I taken my seat when I saw Joseph Hume doing as I had done; others followed in like manner, and I soon became aware that this was the common practice. Whether any change has been made I know not, but I was glad, in being relieved from an imaginary slight, to remark that the members of an assembly accounted one of the most fastidious in the world were not ashamed to wait upon themselves.

A few days later, I received a letter from Lord Duncannon, informing me that Lord Melbourne wished to see me. As head of the Government he would have to introduce the bill into the House of Lords, and he wanted the information necessary for his speech. The place appointed for the interview was his lordship's house, in Green Street, Berkeley Square; the time one o'clock on the following Sunday. Of course, on such an occasion, I was punctuality itself, knocking at his lordship's door exactly as the clock struck. I was shown into the drawing-room, where, however, I found only Lord Duncannon, who informed me that the Premier was not yet up, though, as he had been assured by the servants, he might soon be expected. I must mention, by the way, that Lord Duncannon, who always, I believe, save in his official capacity, had been friendly to my plan, had now taken it up with a certain degree of warmth, having in his place in Parliament declared himself persuaded, "that, with great exertion on the part of those who are to carry the bill into execution, there will ultimately not be any loss," and added, "that he never recollected so strong a wish having been expressed to both Houses of Parliament on any measure as had been expressed on the subject of postage." *

After a little time Lord Melbourne made his

* 'Mirror of Parliament,' vol. xxxviii. p. 4206.

appearance, in his dressing-gown. My reception was most gracious, and we presently went to work. In the course of conversation I had occasion to speak of Mr. Warburton, when his lordship interrupted me with, "Warburton! Warburton! He's one of your moral-force men, isn't he?" I replied that I certainly believed Mr. Warburton's hopes of improvement did rest more on moral than on physical force. "Well," rejoined his lordship, "I can understand your physical-force men, but as to your moral-force men, I'll be damned if I know what they mean." Not hitting upon any apposite reply, I remained silent, and a second time we returned to the subject of the interview, until at length his lordship, seeming to have become possessed of his subject, began to pace the room, as if arranging his speech; often moving his lips, though uttering no audible sound. In this process, however, he was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who made an announcement which did not reach my ear. The answer was, "Show him into the other room," and, after a short time, Lord Melbourne, apologising for leaving us, withdrew. A minute afterwards, the hum of conversation sounded through the folding-doors, and, by and by, one of the voices gradually rose in distinctness and earnestness, taking at length an angry tone, in which I presently heard my own name pronounced. As the voice seemed to me that of a stranger I must have turned an inquiring eye towards Lord Duncannon, who informed me that it was that of Lord Lichfield. After a while, warmth seemed to abate, the tone became moderate, and at length the farewell was given, Lord Melbourne re-entering by the folding-doors, with the remark, "Lichfield has been here; I can't think why a man can't talk of penny postage without going into a passion." We again returned to our work, and this

being at length complete, after a request that I would attend the next day at the House of Lords, I took my leave.

Next day, August 5th, after the presentation of several petitions by Lord Ashburton, Lord Melbourne made the motion in the House of Lords for which, as we have seen, he had duly prepared, proposing, in a long speech, the second reading of the Postage Bill. He fully admitted that the income of the country fell short of the expenditure—allowed that there was great uncertainty as to the fiscal results of penny postage; but intimated that a surplus or deficiency of three or four hundred thousand pounds in an income of forty-eight millions was a matter of comparatively little moment, and justified the course Government had taken mainly on the ground of “the very general feeling and general concurrence of all parties in favour of the plan.”

The Duke of Wellington, after stating various objections to the measure, especially on the score of depression in the finances, yet recognising the evils of high postage rates, and expressing an opinion “that that which was called Mr. Rowland Hill’s plan was, if it was adopted exactly as proposed, of all plans that most likely to be successful,” concluded with saying, “I shall, although with great reluctance, vote for the bill, and I earnestly recommend you to do likewise.”

Lord Brougham ably defended the measure, and Lord Ashburton, though far from sanguine as to the financial results of penny postage, recommended its adoption on account of its commercial and social advantages.

The Earl of Lichfield was anxious to remove the impression that he was opposed to the measure, and “to show that, with perfect consistency with all that he had said or done, he could give a vote for the pro-

posal of his noble friend at the head of the Government." He supported the plan, however, "on entirely different grounds from those on which Mr. Hill proposed it," viz., in relation to the universal demand for the measure, and on the understanding that it was not expected "that by the measure either the revenue would be a gainer or that under it the revenue would be equal to that now derived from the Post Office department."*

After a few words from Viscount Duncannon in favour of the measure, the bill was read a second time, without a division.

According to injunction I was present during the above discussion; as it proceeded there was much anxiety as to the result, but, above all, speculation was busy as to the course that would be taken by the Duke of Wellington. I remember, however, that in the outset I myself felt rather confident on this latter point, having received assurance, as I think, from Lord Duncannon; but when in the course of the discussion the Duke dwelt on the low state of the national finances, and the danger of reducing a duty under such circumstances, I began to fear that I had been misinformed; and I suppose this feeling must have been expressed by my looks; for Lord Duncannon, leaving his seat, kindly came to where I sat, on the steps of the throne, and whispered, "Don't be alarmed, he's not going to oppose us." Thus reassured I listened calmly, and, as the Duke proceeded, perceived distinctly that my fears were groundless.

As I have already stated, the bill was read a second time without a division; the third reading took place four days later without even a debate; the bill receiving the Royal assent on the 17th,† and being afterwards referred to in the follow-

* 'Hansard,' vol. xlix. pp. 1207-1239.

† p. 369.

ing terms in the Queen's Speech on the prorogation of Parliament; a similar honour, I may remark, was accorded to it in two subsequent speeches:—

‘It has been with satisfaction that I have given my consent to a reduction of the postage duties. I trust that the Act which has passed on this subject will be a relief and encouragement to trade, and that, by facilitating intercourse and correspondence, it will be productive of much social advantage and improvement. I have given directions that the preliminary step should be taken to give effect to the intention of Parliament, as soon as the inquiries and arrangements required for this purpose shall have been completed.’*

I must not omit to mention that, on the Royal assent being given, Mr. Wallace, with his usual kindness, wrote to my wife, to congratulate her on the success of her husband's efforts, a success to which her unremitting exertions had greatly contributed.

A collection of letters, twenty-six in number, received by Mr. Moffatt during the period that the bill was in progress, shows how great was the anxiety and likewise the activity of those who took chief interest in the success of the measure. Mr. Wallace, Mr. Travers, and Mr. Ashurst, were zealously co-operating in its promotion, but the most distinguished for activity were Mr. Moffatt and Mr. Cole; while on Mr. Warburton we relied mainly for that discretion, the result of his sagacity and long experience, which was necessary for the control and right direction of our efforts.

Thus, in little more than three years from the time when I entered seriously upon my investigations, and in little more than two years and a half from my first application to Government, this measure, so bold in its innovation and paradoxical in its policy as to be met in the outset with the ridicule and scorn of those to

* ‘Hansard,’ vol. i. p. 369.

whom the public naturally looked as best qualified by position to judge of its value, had become law ; and when I look back on my humble birth, the lack of influential friends with which, in common with the rest of my family, I had had to enter upon the world's struggles, and the great antecedent improbability of my ever being able to exercise any marked influence on public affairs, I cannot but feel proud at belonging to a country where such a career could be run, nor remember without deep gratitude that, sore as had been my difficulties, and heavy my toil, I had received aid from high and low, met with helping hands and generous hearts in hundreds to whom my only introduction and recommendation was what I had been enabled to devise and propose for the public good.

And now again came a period of comparative rest, though, of course, my thoughts frequently reverted to the recommendations kindly made by Mr. Warburton and Mr. Wallace, with no small anxiety about my future relations to the reform now resolved upon. Friends on all hands, from peer to plebeian, assured me that as Government had taken my plan, it must also take me ; but to my mind the consequence did not appear certain ; and even supposing it sure that Government would take me, it yet remained to be inquired what the Government would do with me. On this point, suggestions outran alike eventual result and my own expectation. The following may be taken as a specimen. One of my brothers meeting Lord King, the following conversation took place. “ Well, what are Government going to do with your brother Rowland ? ” “ Nay, my lord, I do not know that they are going to do anything with him. ” “ Oh, they must give him something, no doubt of that ; the only question is what. Now this is what they clearly ought to do.

They should tell Colonel Maberly that he has fought his battle well, stood to his guns to the last, but has been defeated; and that being the case, must, of course, withdraw and make way for his successful rival."

While I thus kept an eye on everything that might give indication as to my future, I received the following letter from Lord Ashburton, who had been, as may be remembered, the first amongst men high in influence and position to take an active part in the promotion of my plan. It will be remarked that his lordship, owing doubtless to his long experience in financial affairs, was more correct than I in his estimate of immediate results; but it must be remembered that penny postage was left for years without those supports which formed an essential part of my plan, and which had been so pointedly urged by the Duke of Wellington as necessary to its results:—

The Grange, Alresford, August 20, 1839.

DEAR SIR,

I most unfeignedly congratulate you that your great measure is so far safely landed. You do too much honour to the part I have humbly taken in this matter. I have certainly been unfeignedly anxious that this important experiment should be tried, and tried fairly; but the merit is undividedly yours, and the success due to the unexampled perseverance and intelligence you have applied to opening and instructing the public mind. What Parliament can do is done, and it only remains to be hoped that success will not be hazarded by imperfect execution. What measures the Post Office will adopt I cannot know, but I think they will make a great mistake if they do not contrive to secure your assistance.

If it should really turn out that your anticipations as to maintaining the revenue are realised, your triumph will be great indeed; one half of it will be more than I expect; but on this point there must, after all, be much speculative uncertainty, and my only regret was that our finances were

not in a better state to make useful experiments. I shall watch the result with great interest, and beg you will believe me,

Dear Sir,

Yours very truly,

ASHBURTON.

ROWLAND HILL, Esq.

I hope the principle of prepayment will be stoutly maintained. Any relaxation must be very temporary and with a large additional charge. Without this the scheme will not work. The plan of postage-stamps seems to my mind the best. The post-officers should sell them, and as everybody must put his letter into some office, he may there also buy his stamp.

About a fortnight later I was summoned to take my part, a passive one, in a very gratifying proceeding at Wolverhampton, where a subscription had been raised to present me with a handsome silver candelabrum, which bore the following inscription :—

To ROWLAND HILL, Esq., presented by the inhabitants of Wolverhampton, in testimony of their high sense of his public services, as the Founder and able Advocate of the Plan of Universal Penny Postage, A.D. 1839.

CHAPTER V.

APPOINTMENT IN TREASURY. (1839.)

BEFORE leaving town for Wolverhampton, as I was in constant hope of a communication from Government, I had given strict injunction at the South Australian Office that if any such communication arrived it should be forwarded without delay. Now it so happened that a certain gentleman, well known to us at the time in connection with Australian affairs, had bestowed on our proceedings more attention than was either profitable or convenient, and had begun to be regarded much in the light in which, doubtless, I myself was then viewed at the Post Office ; in short, he had been unanimously voted an intolerable bore. When, therefore, a packet arrived at the office with what appeared to be his name written in the left-hand corner of the direction, it was naturally treated as a missive which might very conveniently await my return ; and it was not until a messenger came from the Treasury to inquire why no notice had been taken of a letter from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that the clerk on duty became aware of the mistake. Hastening to correct the blunder, well aware of the Post Office delay, and impressed with the novel speed of railway conveyance, he instantly made up the despatch in a brown paper parcel, which he sent, with all speed, to the station, but which, by the tardiness of its conveyance, practically demonstrated that even postal dilatoriness might be outdone.

The packet came into my hands just before the ceremony of presentation began, and, being of course eagerly opened, was found to contain a summons to Downing Street; a fact contributing, as may be supposed, not a little to the pleasure of the day. Of course the call was obeyed without loss of time.

On presenting myself at the Treasury I was very courteously received by the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. (afterwards Sir) Francis Baring (Mr. Spring Rice having been just raised to the peerage); and before speaking of what occurred, I wish to premise that I afterwards found in Mr. Baring a steady friend and zealous supporter, his kind interest in my plan and myself never failing until death.

This first interview, however, was on one important point very unsatisfactory. To make this clear, it must be recollected that I then held a permanent office, involving heavy duties and implying great trust and responsibility, and that though my salary was as yet only 500*l.* a-year (all salaries in this new department being then low), yet as I had been fortunate enough to give full satisfaction, I had every prospect of increase, and a fair chance of eventual promotion. When, therefore, it was proposed that I should abandon this position to accept an engagement for two years only, without any increase of salary, I must confess I could scarcely avoid regarding the offer as an affront, and was yet more struck with the disadvantage at which such degradation would place me in respect of ability to carry out my plans; nor was I so overawed by official dignity as altogether to repress my feelings. However I brought the conference to a close by informing Mr. Baring that I must consult my friends upon his offer; and that, as my eldest brother was then at Leicester, I thought it would be three days before I could give my answer.

Accordingly, on the following day, I went betimes to Bruce Castle, and having conferred with my brothers there, proceeded to Leicester; arriving (as yet railways were few and disjointed) late in the evening. I found my brother stretched on a sofa; he had had a hard day's work in conducting an inquiry, at the instance of the Lords of the Treasury, into some corporation affairs, and seemed quite exhausted; so that although I was aware he must know that important business alone could have brought me so far, I naturally proposed to defer everything to the next day. Of this, however, he would not hear; saying that he had to proceed on the morrow with the enquiry, so that no time must be lost. To do the best under the circumstances I began my story in as passionless a manner as I could command; and for a short time he listened quietly enough, seeming too much oppressed by fatigue to be capable of strong interest. When, however, I came to the offer of 500*l.*, a startling change occurred, the form but now so full of lassitude becoming at once overcharged with muscular energy. He seemed not merely to start but to bound from the sofa, his face flushing, and his frame quivering with indignation. When he became somewhat more composed, and the whole matter had been duly discussed, he suggested that he should write a letter for me to hand to the Chancellor of the Exchequer; and when I had eagerly accepted his offer, he consented—the hour being by this time over late—to defer the execution of his task until morning.

Accordingly, at an early hour, we were at work, I writing from his dictation; and when the draft was completed, my sister-in-law, who fortunately had accompanied her husband, transcribed it, and the signature being appended, I returned to town by the first conveyance, reaching home in the middle of

the night The following is my brother's letter. I need not apologise for its insertion in full :—

Leicester, Sept. 12, 1839.

DEAR ROWLAND,

Before I give you my opinion, I think it better to prevent the possibility of misapprehension, by putting in writing the heads of what you have reported to me as having occurred at the interview between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and yourself on Tuesday, respecting your proposed employment by the Government in carrying your plan of Post Office reform into operation.

You state that Mr. Baring, having regard to what had been arranged between Lord Monteagle and himself, offered to engage your services for two years for the sum of 500*l.* per annum ; you, for that remuneration, undertaking to give up your whole time to the public service. That on your expressing surprise and dissatisfaction at this proposal, the offer was raised to 800*l.*, and subsequently to 1000*l.* per annum. You state that your answer to these proposals was, in substance, that you were quite willing to give your services gratuitously, or to postpone the question of remuneration until the experiment shall be tried ; but that you could not consent to enter upon such an undertaking on a footing in any way inferior to that of the Secretary to the Post Office. You explained, you say, the object which you had in view in making this stipulation—you felt that it was a necessary stipulation to insure you full power to carry the measure into effect.

I have carefully considered the whole matter in all its bearings, and I cannot raise in my mind a doubt of the propriety of your abiding by these terms ; and I will set down, as shortly as I can, the reasons which have occurred to me to show that the course you have taken was the only one really open to you.

It is quite clear that to insure a fair trial for your plan you will require great powers ; that Ministers will not interfere with you themselves, nor, as far as they can prevent it, suffer you to be thwarted by others, I can readily believe ; but I am not so sure of their power as I am of their goodwill. You have excited great hostility at the Post Office—that

we know as a matter of fact ; but it must have been inferred if the fact had not been known. It is not in human nature that the gentlemen of the Post Office should view your plan with friendly eyes. If they are good-natured persons, as I dare say they are, they will forgive you in time ; but they have much to overlook. That a stranger should attempt to understand the arcana of our system of postage better than those whose duty it was to attain to such knowledge, was bad enough ; that he should succeed, was still worse ; but that he should persuade the country and the Parliament that he had succeeded is an offence very difficult to pardon. Now, you are called upon to undertake the task of carrying into action, through the agency of these gentlemen, what they have pronounced preposterous, wild, visionary, absurd, clumsy, and impracticable. They have thus pledged themselves, by a distinct prophecy, repeated over and over again, that the plan cannot succeed. I confess I hold in great awe prophets who may have the means of assisting in the fulfilment of their own predictions. Believe me, you will require every aid which Government, backed by the country, can give you to conquer these difficulties. You found it no easy task to defeat your opponents in the great struggle which is just concluded ; but what was that to what you are now called upon to effect ? no less an enterprise than to change your bitter enemies into hearty allies, pursuing your projects with goodwill, crushing difficulties instead of raising them, and using their practical knowledge, not to repel your suggestions and to embarrass your arrangements, but using that same knowledge in your behalf, aiding and assisting in those matters wherein long experience gives them such a great advantage over you, and which may be turned for or against you at the pleasure of the possessors.

To try this great experiment, therefore, with a fair chance of success, it must be quite clear that you have the confidence of the Government ; and that can only be shown by their advancing you to an equality, at least, with the principal executive officer among those with whose habits and prejudices you must of necessity so much and so perpetually interfere. Have you made Mr. Baring sufficiently aware of the numerous—I might say numberless—innovations, which your plan of necessity implies ? The reduction of postage and the modes of prepayment are, no doubt, the principal features of your plan ; but you lay great stress, and very

properly, in my opinion, on increasing the facilities for transmitting letters; and this part of the reform will, I apprehend, cause you more labour of detail than that which more strikes the public eye. In this department you will be left to contend with the Post Office almost alone. It will be very easy to raise plausible objections to your measures, of which Ministers can hardly be supposed to be competent judges, either in respect of technical information or of leisure for inquiry. Neither would the public, even if you had the means and inclination to appeal to it, give you assistance in matters upon which you could never fix its attention.

But your personal weight and importance as compared with that of others who it is reasonable to believe will, in the first instance at least, be opposed to you, will be measured very much by comparison of salary. We may say what we will, but Englishmen are neither aristocratic nor democratic, but chrysocratic (to coin a word). Your salary will, therefore, if you have one at all, fix your position in the minds of every functionary of the Post Office, from the Postmaster-General to the bellman, both inclusive.

But though I see these insuperable objections to your accepting either of the salaries which have been offered, I will not advise you (and you would reject such advice if I gave it) to embarrass the Government, if there be any difficulty, which there may be unknown to us, in the way of their either giving you a higher salary, or postponing the question of remuneration until the end of the two years. Your offer made on the spur of the moment, to surrender your present appointment, and work for the public without salary, though it does look somewhat "wild and visionary" at first sight, yet after a long and careful reflection upon it, I distinctly advise you to renew, and more than that, I seriously hope it will be accepted. Your fortune, though most men would consider it very small, is enough to enable you to live two years without additional income; and I feel certain that the Government and the country will do you and your family justice in the end; but suppose I should be mistaken, and that you never receive a shilling for either your plan or your services in carrying it into operation, I should be very glad to change places with you, and so would thousands of your countrymen, if, on taking

your labours and privations, they could also feel conscious of your merit.

I remain, &c.

M. D. HILL.

This letter I forwarded the next day, enclosing it in a short one from myself to the same effect; in which also I proposed to wait upon Mr. Baring at four o'clock, to give him any further explanation that might be required.

On presenting myself accordingly I was received in a manner not merely courteous but most friendly; no time was lost in debate, and I was requested to call again the following day at one o'clock, to see the draft of a letter which Mr. Baring undertook to prepare meanwhile. Of this letter, which, upon my expressing satisfaction with it, Mr. Baring immediately signed and handed to me, the following is a copy:—

Downing Street, September 14, 1839.

SIR,

I write you the result of our interviews, feeling that it may be a satisfaction to you to possess some memorandum on paper.

With respect to the position in which you would be placed, I would explain that you will be attached to the Treasury, and considered as connected with that department with reference to the proposed alterations in the Post Office. You will have access to the Post Office, and every facility given you of inquiry both previously to the arrangements being settled and during their working. Your communications will be to the Treasury, from whom any directions to the Post Office will be issued; and you will not exercise any direct authority, or give any immediate orders to the officers of the Post Office. I make this explanation as to the mode of doing our business, to prevent future misunderstanding. Your communications and suggestions, &c., will be with the Treasury, in whom I consider the power to superintend and carry into effect these alterations to be vested.

With respect to the money arrangements, I understand

the employment to be secured for two years certain, at the rate of 1500*l.* per annum. I should also add that the employment is considered as temporary, and not to give a *claim* to continued employment in office at the termination of these two years.

Having put duly upon paper a memorandum of our conversation, I cannot conclude without expressing my satisfaction that the Treasury are to have the benefit of your assistance in the labour which the legislature has imposed upon us, and my conviction that you will find from myself and the Board that confidence and cordiality which will be necessary for the well working of the proposed alterations.

I am, &c.

F. T. BARING.

ROWLAND HILL, Esq.

Of course I inwardly objected to that clause in the letter which limited my engagement to two years, but, with my usual self-reliance, I reckoned upon making myself within that period so useful as to secure a permanent appointment. Mr. Baring having referred to the arrangement which placed me, not at the Post Office, but at the Treasury, I replied that of course he might put me then where he liked, but that I should end by being Secretary to the Post Office—a prediction eventually fulfilled, though certainly by no means so speedily as I expected.

The letter was soon followed by a Treasury Minute, making the formal appointment. On carefully reconsidering both, I thought that my powers were neither so considerable nor so clearly set forth as could be desired; nevertheless two days later, viz., on Monday, September 16th, 1839, I entered on the duties of my new office, rejoicing in the belief that I was at length in a position to effect the great reform I had originated, feeling, also, at the moment, well rewarded for all past labours and anxieties, and, though not blind to

future difficulties, yet too well pleased with my success thus far, and with the kind congratulations which poured in from all sides—my zealous champion Mr. Wallace, taking the lead—to allow any painful anticipations much place in my thoughts.

From what has already been stated, the reader must be aware that, however deep the gratification with which, at the end of three years' unceasing effort, I at length found myself in a recognised position, in direct communication with persons of high authority, and intrusted with powers which, however weak and limited in the outset, seemed, if discreetly used, not unlikely in due time to acquire strength and durability, I was far from supposing that the attainment of my post was the attainment of my object. The obstacles, numerous and formidable, which had been indicated in my brother's letter, had all, I felt, a real existence; while others were sure to appear of which, as yet, I knew little or nothing. Still I felt no way daunted; but relying at once on the efficiency of my plan, and on the promised support of Government, I felt confident of eventual achievement; and, of course, resolved to spare no effort that could tend to this result.

On the very day that I took my place in Downing Street I accompanied the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Mr. Robert Stewart, one of the Lords of the Treasury, to the Post Office, in order to inspect the practical working of the department, which, as already mentioned, I had never had a prior opportunity of witnessing.

My first impressions contradicted in some measure my expectations; the whole process of dealing with the letters I found more rapid than I had supposed. Here, however, was a fallacy, very naturally produced, and which has doubtless imposed upon many an unpractised visitor. The presence of strangers

naturally puts every man on his mettle ; and efforts are made which could not be long sustained. Again, the head of a department, zealous for its reputation, directs observation, unconsciously perhaps, to his best men ; while the unwary spectator, generalising on both points, attributes to every pair of hands and to the whole period of manipulation a speed which rightly pertains only to a few individuals and even in their case to a very brief time. Another source of misconception I found to lurk in the many errors made in the haste of action ; whereby a large number of letters came back to the hands which had passed them, and being viewed by the observer as new letters, failed, of course, to produce any abatement in his estimate of speed.

I found, the “taxation of letters” more rapid, and the sorting slower, than I had reckoned upon ; but soon perceived that the latter process was greatly impeded by want of room, which was indeed bitterly complained of by those concerned, and appeared most conspicuously in the removal of bags, which, having to be half lifted, half dragged in and out of the sorting rooms, jostled each other very inconveniently by the way. This lack of space was the more remarkable, since the building, which had been erected at enormous expense, was as yet only ten years old, and had witnessed but little increase of business within its walls.

The rooms indeed were lofty, even to the full height of the edifice, but yet ill ventilated ; reminding one of what has been said by I forget whom, viz., that if the crowd be but dense enough, a man may be stifled even where his ceiling is the sky. A thermometer in the room marked 72°, but I was informed it sometimes rose to 90° ; so that between heat and impurity of the air the men’s working powers must have been seriously impaired ; to say nothing

of more durable injury to their health. Some of the officers in attendance suggested the construction of galleries ; which, without lessening the general height of the room, might afford more space ; but knowing that mere height, as indeed shown by the actual state of things, is but a secondary consideration, and observing that there was considerable space between the ceiling and the roof, I recommended that the room should be divided into two floors, the ceiling being raised, and that for the removal of bags, recourse should be had to lifts, such as I had seen in use in the cotton mills at Belper and elsewhere. Both these suggestions were eventually adopted.

As this inspection had the disadvantage of being foreknown, I determined that my next should be made without notice ; and accordingly somewhat surprised my friends at the Office by appearing amongst them soon after six the next morning. I did not perceive, however, any noticeable difference in the state of things, save that, the work being less, and the hands therefore fewer, there was a corresponding decrease of bustle and closeness.

On going to the Treasury, I suggested to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that as room at the Post Office was already deficient, and was likely to be more so when the lower rate was adopted, no time should be lost in establishing the district offices and uniting the two corps of letter-carriers, as recommended in my evidence before the Post Office Commissioners. Repeating this recommendation on the following day, I was requested to draw up a paper giving my views in detail ; Mr. Baring telling me that he should have occasion to see Colonel Maberly in a few days, and that he would confer with him on the subject. To dispose of this matter for the present, I must say that I did not then succeed in convincing the Chancellor of the Ex-

chequer of the soundness of my views, and that, in fact, they were not acted upon until fifteen years later.

At the same time Mr. Baring expressed a wish that I should speedily visit the French Post Office, which he had been informed was in some important respects exceedingly well managed; a desire to which I of course readily acceded.

I may mention here that my journal, after a long suspension, was now resumed; and it is by reference to this that I am able to give details which have long ago passed from my memory. I find that my practice was still to rise at six, and to proceed straightway to work at my official duties; indeed, when I was at the Treasury, my attention was so much diverted to questions of detail on postal matters of all kinds that, had I confined my work to office hours, though I made these unusually long, the progress of reform, slow as it actually was, would have been reduced to a veritable snail's pace. My long hours, however, soon obliged me to apply for additional assistance.

From this journal I proceed to give one or two extracts; premising that, were I to print it entire, it would give the reader a tolerable outline of the subsequent course of postal reform, but would be sometimes enigmatical, sometimes tedious; and moreover would occasionally show an irritation, of which the expression now, as then, is better confined to my *secrétaire*:—

‘1839, *September* 20.—Mr. Baring came to me at the Treasury. [He] had not been able to look over the *agenda*, though at work till four this morning. Will take it next, and let me know when ready to discuss it. Asked me to state what assistance I thought necessary. I replied that I wished to engage the services of Cole (whom I had mentioned on a previous day), and that I required a clerk or amanuensis.

* * * As to a clerk, B. recommended that I should select one from the Post Office, as his practical knowledge would be useful to me. To this I assented, and it was arranged that B. should write to Colonel Maberly on the subject, but it afterwards occurred to me that the arrangement might possibly lead to unpleasant consequences. I therefore went to Mr. Baring and represented this view of the subject, at the same time proposing that I should engage Mr. Ledingham. * * * To this B. consented. I proposed a salary of 40s. per week, but B. objected to more than 30s., such being the allowance to supernumerary clerks in the Customs. The salary was therefore fixed at this sum.'

The engagement of Mr. Cole, applied for as above, was completed three days later; and thus I had the great satisfaction of retaining after my appointment aid which had been so highly serviceable before. Mr. Ledingham, also, was engaged, and fully justified Mr. Gardiner's recommendation;* working with me through many years, first at the Treasury and afterwards at the Post Office, up to the commencement of his fatal illness, with intelligence, fidelity, and zeal.

About this time I began to experience somewhat of that kind of annoyance which my own proceedings during the last two years and a half must have produced to the Post Office authorities, and in some measure to the Government of the day. I was now myself, in some sort, within the pale, and I began to find that through my difference of position there was a decided change in the sound produced by a knocking at the outer gate.

Suggestions for improvement, generally superfluous or impracticable, and applications on other subjects soon became numerous; and were sufficient in the aggregate to occupy much time, and to make me practically understand the nervous irritability

* Mr. Gardiner was Secretary to the Commissioners of Post Office Enquiry; Mr. Ledingham was his clerk.

produced in all Government departments by applications from without.

Soon after my appointment I received a letter from one of the subordinates at the Chief Office, making various suggestions of improvement. Fearing that this proceeding might be a breach of discipline, I consulted the Chancellor of the Exchequer as to the course to be adopted. Mr. Baring expressed himself much pleased at my caution, and wrote immediately to Colonel Maberly, to learn his wishes on the subject, receiving for answer that Colonel Maberly saw no objection to such communications.

A day or two later I again visited the Post Office, and was present at the sorting of letters for the twopenny post. Here was anything rather than the pressure which I had observed in the evening sorting of the General Post letters, the force being evidently far too great for the work; so that at the rate at which I *saw* the letters sorted the average number per delivery, say six thousand, might have been sorted completely in the time occupied (about an hour and quarter) by four persons; and yet the sorters formed quite a crowd. Of course I found in this fact additional reason for that union of the two divisions of letter-carriers which was an essential preliminary to the establishment of the district system.

In my journey to Paris, which, though rather quick for the period, occupied more than two days and a night, exclusive of one night of rest by the way. I was accompanied by Mr. Wynne of the London Inland Office, whose knowledge of detail I thought would be useful in the proposed inspection; my wife also going with me as amanuensis. I called immediately on M. Conte, the Postmaster-General, and being received with great politeness, made arrangements for visiting the office early on Monday morning (it was then Saturday). I received also every assist-

ance from Mr. Henry Lytton Bulwer, then acting as English Minister in the absence of Lord Granville, and to him I presented my credentials from Lord Palmerston.

On the appointed morning, having risen before five o'clock, I went to the Post Office, and witnessed the whole process of the morning duty; which, however, differed but little from that carried on in the London office; of which indeed it was, in most particulars, avowedly a copy.

Not to dwell too minutely on this inspection, I will only state some few of the results set forth in my report.

Having given certain tables, I sum up as follows:—

I found that the gross Post Office revenue of France was about two-thirds that of England; the expenses, about twenty per cent. more, and the net revenue somewhat less than one half.*

The rates of postage I found to be about two-thirds of our rates for corresponding distances, but to vary for equal distances, not as with us, according to the number of enclosures, but simply [as I had proposed for England] according to the weight of the letter or packet.†

I found a kind of book post in use; the charges, however, being regulated not by weight, but by superficial measurement of the paper.‡

Considering the small extent of Paris as compared with London, I found the number of Post-offices much larger, viz., 246 against 237.§

The process of "taxing" letters by weight naturally attracted my earnest attention, as one of the points on which my opinion had differed much from those of the Post Office authorities. Certainly, first appearances were against me, the rate of proceeding being

* 'Report on the French Post Office,' p. 2.

† p. 5.

‡ p. 6.

§ p. 6.

only twenty-six and a half letters per minute, whereas Mr. Bokenham had described some careful experiments made in the London office, which gave an average of thirty-three letters per minute taxed in the English manner.

A short examination, however, set all to rights; for the weighing apparatus was nothing better than a common pair of scales; and the gradations of weight were so small (less even than a quarter of an ounce) as to keep the scales in frequent use; while, by the half-ounce gradation proposed for England, they would not be required for one letter in ten. I found, too, my opinion in favour of weight confirmed by all such officers here as I consulted.*

Another subject of special importance at the time was the classification of the letter-carriers; and here I had the pleasure of finding that there existed no such distinction as that which I had ventured to condemn in the London Office; and that its absence was held to be an advantage.†

There was another point on which the French Post Office was—and it must be admitted still is—in advance of ours, viz. that it undertakes the transmission of valuables of small dimensions at a commission paid of five per cent. If the article be lost, the Post Office pays the price at which it was valued.‡

An arrangement for transmitting money through the Post Office was, I found, in great use, or what I thought such, while our money-order system, owing to the high rates of charge and other causes had but a very limited operation; the yearly amount transmitted being less than half that in France.

On the safety of prepayment some of the gentlemen connected with the French Post Office shared the apprehensions expressed in England;

* ‘Report on the French Post Office, p. 10.

† Ibid.

‡ p. 11.

though M. Piron held with me that securities might easily be established against the expected danger. I need not say that in our own country, at least, experience has shown the alarm to have been unfounded.

On another point of anxiety, likewise set at rest by experience, viz., the apprehended forgery of stamps, my own views received decided confirmation from M. Cordier, the head of the Stamp Department.

Such are the chief points of my Report, which, I may add, being printed for the use of members of Government, and copies being sent to the London daily papers, appeared next morning at full length in the *Times*.

Meanwhile, there had appeared in the ‘Quarterly Review’ an elaborate attack, said to have been written by Mr. Croker, on my whole plan and all its supporters; the Mercantile Committee, the Parliamentary Committee, the witnesses, and above all the Government, receiving each a share of the reproaches which fell primarily upon myself. This philippic was answered in the next number of the ‘Edinburgh Review,’ in an article written by my brother Matthew. As almost all the points debated have now been decided by experience, I do not think it needful to give an abstract of the two articles, but merely make a few extracts, which may still interest or amuse. Any one, however, curious as to the state of affairs and of opinions at the time, may find it worth his trouble to peruse both.

But, before proceeding further, I must mention, first, that Mr. Murray happening to meet my brother soon after the publication of the article in the ‘Quarterly,’ expressed his regret at its appearance; and, secondly, that in the same journal appeared at a later period, viz., in 1850, an article of a very different character, written by Sir Francis Head, in whose collected Essays it is republished.

I must also mention that the earlier article in the 'Quarterly' contains one statement of some importance, which, had I recollected it at the proper time, would have been useful in a recent discussion as to the origin of postage stamps:—

'M. Piron tells us that the idea of a post-paid envelope originated early in the reign of Louis XIV. with M. de Valayer, who, in 1653, established (with royal approbation) a private penny-post, placing boxes at the corners of the streets for the reception of letters wrapped up in envelopes, which were to be bought at offices established for that purpose. * * * *

'But this device had long been forgotten even in France; and we have no doubt that when Mr. Charles Knight, an extensive publisher as well as an intelligent literary man, proposed, some years since, a stamped cover for the circulation of newspapers, he was under no obligation for the idea to Monsieur de Valayer. Mr. Hill, adopting Mr. Knight's suggestion, has applied it to the general purposes of the Post Office with an ingenuity and address which make it his own.'†

I must add that the writer emphatically joined me in condemning parliamentary franks, and laid blame upon the Government for having so long delayed all improvement, for not having proceeded to action on the first appearance of my plan, and above all, for not having given to postal reform that gradual introduction which I had recommended.‡

The unsoundness of my views is set forth to the writer's satisfaction a few pages later, the italics here and elsewhere being the reviewer's:—

'We are bound to say, after the perusal of the evidence and a mature consideration of all the arguments of Mr. Hill and his advocates, that whatever may be thought of the *abstract* advantages of a general penny postage, *Mr. Hill's specific plan* has broken down on almost every point, both as to the

* 'Quarterly Review,' No. 128, p. 552. † p. 555. ‡ p. 571

facts on which it professes to stand, and on the results which it promises.*

My statement that Post Office revenue had remained stationary during the twenty years preceding the writing of my pamphlet is pronounced to be completely overthrown by the fact that the Post Office revenue had doubled during the fifteen years preceding that period.†

Expectation of moral benefits from low postage is thus met:—

‘On the whole we feel that, so far from the *exclusive* benefits to “*order, morals, and religion*,” which Mr. Hill and the committee put forward, there is, at least, as great a chance of the contrary mischief, and that the proposed penny post might perhaps be more justly characterised as “*sedition made easy*.”‡

Remembering the old rates of postage, the reader will be struck with the following laudation:—

‘We are prepared to contend * * * that as long as any species of taxes or duties are to be levied, there is none more legitimate in principle, or more fair and equitable in practice, than the Post Office revenue; nay, none—no, not one in our whole financial system—so much so!’§

No wonder that the writer should be well satisfied, since he had previously reminded his readers that “a letter on any sized sheet, with any quantity of writing which it can hold,” and with “a separate invoice or other enclosure” added thereto, could be sent from London to Glasgow for the small charge of two shillings and fourpence.||

The reader of the present day, whom dire necessity has accustomed to modern hardships, will be roused to a sense of his condition by learning that “prepayment by means of a stamp or stamped cover is

* ‘Quarterly Review,’ No. 128, p. 520.

† p. 524.

‡ p. 531.

§ p. 533.

|| p. 538.

universally admitted to be quite the reverse of convenient, foreign to the habits of the people,”* &c.

I proceed now to give a few passages from the article in reply.

The following is perhaps the first public notice of a change already felt, but which soon took a more positive and troublesome form :—

‘But the introduction of the bill into Parliament produced some curious phenomena out of doors, worthy of a moment’s attention. The journals whose duty it is to prove Ministers in the wrong, whatever side of whatever question they may elect to take, had seized upon Mr. Hill’s plan as a godsend. That any Chancellor of the Exchequer should have the courage to adopt such a reduction of rates never entered their imagination; but they knew very well that the change would be extremely popular, and that abundance of fact and argument could be adduced in its behalf. Here, then, was a prize—faction served and popularity gained by the same course. Accordingly, none were so loud and long in favour of penny-postage as the Tory journals—none so intolerant of delay. * * *

‘But their prayers are at length heard—their aspirations for a penny rate are about to be accomplished. What, then, is their course of action? Do they rejoice in their success? Not at all. On such occasions, journalists are in the habit of making somewhat liberal claims on the public approbation for their own share in the struggle; and they attribute, perhaps, sufficient potency to their own exertions and influence. But with exemplary modesty and forbearance, our Tory “contemporaries” refrain from a single note of triumph. They rarely break silence at all, and when they do, it is to hint a doubt of the soundness of their own views. Their occupation is gone! at least for a time. The change in the political atmosphere produced a corresponding change in the Dutch weather-house of Tory politics. Fair-weather Joan retired from view, and foul-weather John took her place.’ †

In the following passage the rationale of uniformity

* ‘Quarterly Review,’ No. 128, p. 551.

† ‘Edinburgh Review,’ vol. cxlii. p. 550.

in rate with variety in distance is so clearly set forth, that even though the practical question has long since been decided, I cannot pass it over :—

‘The cost of postage to the Post Office is divisible into three heads :—the cost of receiving a letter into the office—of its transmission from town to town—and of delivery to the correspondent. The first and last of these heads, it is clear, must be pretty much the same for all letters ; at all events, these heads of cost will not vary according to the distance which the letter travels. The item of transmission would certainly never at first sight be expected to be uniform. Mr. Hill, however, as we think, has demonstrated, that it is so small in itself, and is so little increased by any increase of distance, that to consider it as uniform is a nearer approximation to exact justice than can be made by any variation expressible in the smallest coin. We must refer to the Report for the calculations on which the exact amount is founded. All that we shall here do is, to examine the principle on which this uniformity is founded. It is quite obvious that the essential cost of transmitting light articles is not in the ratio of distance, but in the inverse ratio of numbers. Give a porter a letter to carry a mile, and you will pay him a shilling ; give him a hundred letters, to be delivered at one place at a distance of five miles ; and, even if he charges five shillings, it is obvious that each of these latter epistles will be despatched at a twentieth of the cost of the former.’*

The following, written, it must be observed, before the establishment of the penny rate, shows a very just estimate of subsequent results :—

‘That some years may elapse before the Post Office revenue recovers its position, is highly probable ; but in our minds this does not at all affect the propriety of adopting the plan. If its principles are well founded, there should be an increase from year to year ; and when the amount arrives again at its present height, there will be nothing in this circumstance to make it stationary. It will go on to a surplus, on which we may fairly calculate to counterbalance the deficit of the early years.’†

* ‘Edinburgh Review,’ vol. cxlii. p. 561.

† p. 572.

The article thus concludes :—

‘Let, then, any temporary diminution of income be regarded as an outlay. It would be but slight considered with reference to the objects in view, and yet all that is demanded for the mightiest social improvement ever attempted at a single effort. Suppose even an average yearly loss of a million for ten years. It is but half what the country has paid for the abolition of slavery, without the possibility of any *money* return. Treat the deficit as an outlay of capital, and those who make a serious affair of it suppose that a great nation is to shrink from a financial operation which a joint-stock company would laugh at. But enough of revenue. Even if the hope of ultimate profit should altogether fail, let us recur to a substituted tax ; and if we are asked, What tax ? we shall answer, Any tax you please—certain that none can operate so fatally on all other sources of revenue as this. Letters are the *primordia rerum* of the commercial world. To tax them at all, is condemned by those who are best acquainted with the operations of finances. Surely, then, cent. per cent. will hardly be deemed too slight a burden, and yet that—nay, more than that—the new plan will yield.

‘But the country will never consent to adjudge this great cause on points of revenue. That the Post Office ought to be open to all in practice, as well as in theory, is now felt to be as necessary to our progress in true civilisation as the liberty of the press, the representation of the people in Parliament, public education, sound law reform, the freedom of commerce, and whatever else we require to maintain our “high prerogative of teaching the nations how to live.”’*

* ‘Edinburgh Review,’ vol. cxlii. p. 572.

CHAPTER VI.

PENNY POSTAGE. (1839-40.)

MY attention, on my return from France (in October of this year), was mainly directed to the means of introducing the system of penny postage as promptly as was consistent with safety, much care being obviously necessary to put the office in order for the expected flood of letters before the sluices were opened. The Chancellor of the Exchequer suggested that in the outset stamped letters should not be admitted later than 3 P.M.; the time to be extended when practicable. The heads of the two chief departments in the Circulation Office urged, as a preliminary, the erection of the galleries already spoken of; a measure to which I objected, both because of the time that it would take, and because I thought a large outlay at the chief office, the estimate, without including any arrangement for better ventilation, being as high as 8,000*l.*, would delay the establishment of those district offices on which I relied so much both for public convenience and for the maintenance of the revenue. As a temporary expedient, I suggested the use of a part of the Bull and Mouth Inn, which happened then to be vacant; a suggestion which, unluckily, found no favour at the Post Office; so that as the Chancellor of the Exchequer could not make up his mind to adopt the district system, immediate alterations were

resolved upon, at the reduced cost, however, of 6,000*l*.

One cause of delay was found in an invitation issued by the Treasury, accompanied with the offer of reward, for plans of collecting the postage, whether by stamps or otherwise ; a proceeding which precluded any positive action until all the plans, which poured in from various quarters, should have been duly examined. The communications were more than two thousand five hundred in number, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who had intended to read all himself, was obliged to delegate the task to the Junior Lords of the Treasury, who must have had dry work of it, as I better knew, when a considerable portion of the work devolved ultimately upon myself. Foreseeing much delay, I suggested to the Chancellor of the Exchequer the expediency of allowing, in the first instance, prepayment by money, though, as I pointed out, this course might increase the difficulty of introducing the stamp.

A few days later, viz., on November the 2nd, I laid before the Chancellor of the Exchequer the sketch of a plan which I had devised for the gradual introduction of the new system. This was at once to introduce into the London district the penny rate for prepaid letters, and to abolish throughout the district the additional charge of twopence then imposed on every General Post letter delivered beyond certain limits. As to the rest of the country, I proposed immediately to fix fourpence as the maximum single inland rate ; with the abolition of all anomalous charges, such as a penny for crossing the Menai Bridge, the halfpenny for crossing the Scottish border, and the penny for delivery beyond certain limits. These recommendations, after having been fully considered by the Post Office and the Treasury, were carried into effect on the 5th December.

In the interim there came to me, at the Treasury, three letter-carriers from the twopenny post department, who had jointly drawn up a very clever paper relating to the metropolitan delivery. The name of one was Job Smith, but those of the others I did not retain. The three are thus spoken of in my journal :—

‘They are exceedingly intelligent men, the two elder especially. Their plan differs but little from my own (*vide* 9th Report of the Commissioners). They assure me they have neither seen nor heard of my plan, and I believe them, for on those points on which we differ they preferred my plan when explained to them; indeed, they have applied the plan to the General Post delivery precisely in the manner I intended, though I believe my intentions have never yet appeared in print. Their paper and their conversation fully confirm the soundness of my views.’

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, however, expressed doubts as to both the economy and the safety of prepayment; and though he admitted that stamps must be tried, and though I submitted an elaborate Report on the whole subject, his doubts grew yet stronger; but as I remained confident, he gave way, only declaring that he threw the responsibility of that part of the measure entirely upon me. Even had I felt any misgiving, it was now too late to draw back; but I accepted the responsibility with alacrity.

Amidst these proceedings there were one or two occurrences of some interest.

I received a letter from Mr. Cobden (used, with some others in this narrative, with the consent of his widow), from which I give an extract, showing that however favourably I may have thought of my plan, his expectations far outran my own :—

‘I am prepared to see all the world sorely puzzled and surprised, to find that the revenue from the penny postage *exceeds* the first year any former income of the Post Office.’

The Chancellor of the Exchequer consulted me as to the policy of taking advantage of the willingness, as reported by Dr. (now Sir John) Bowring, of the State of Hamburg to reduce the charge on English transit letters from fourpence to a penny in consideration of their letters being charged a penny for passing through England. I strongly advised that the treaty should be concluded forthwith, which was accordingly done; this treaty, the first foreign result of English postal reform, being duly welcomed.

When, however, I was consulted as to the policy of further reducing the inland rate on foreign letters generally, before negotiating similar reductions with foreign powers, I advised against that course, as likely to render such negotiations more difficult; and the project was abandoned.

The question of probable forgery of the stamp still causing much anxiety, various conferences were held on the subject; in which I was assisted by Mr. Wickham and Mr. Pressly from the Stamp Office, Mr. Bokenham and Mr. Smith from the Post Office, and my brother Edwin (subsequently appointed Superintendent of Postage Stamps, and eventually of Stamps generally). Not to go into tedious details, it may be mentioned that the three kinds of stamps now in use, though in very different degrees, viz., stamped letter-paper, stamped envelopes, and adhesive stamps, were agreed upon, and obtained the approval of the Treasury.

In the minute establishing the fourpenny rate, care had been taken to show that the measure was only temporary, and merely intended to give needful practice in the new mode of charge, viz., by weight, before the great expected increase in the number of letters should occur. The explanation, however, did not give universal satisfaction, and I began now practically to feel how great an advantage had been

neglected when Government declined to take up postal reform without awaiting the coercion of popular demand. The spontaneous reduction of the existing high rates to a maximum of even sixpence or eightpence, would have been welcomed with joy and gratitude; now so low a *maximum* as fourpence, though this was the lowest of all General Post rates when my pamphlet was published, was received with no small amount of dissatisfaction. Suspicions arose that the concession would go no further; Government was accused of an intention to cheat the public; and I, too, had a share in the accusation, being charged in some of the newspapers with having betrayed my own cause. Hitherto denunciations had fallen on me from above; my elevation to office now gave opportunity—speedily seized on—for attacks from below. I had learnt, however, before this time, that all this was to be expected and endured; that the only chance of escaping obloquy is to avoid prominence; that the thin-skinned should keep within the pale of private life.

December the 5th, the day appointed for the first change, was of course passed in considerable anxiety as to the result, but of necessity I had to await the next morning for the satisfaction of my curiosity. The following is from my journal, December 6th:—

‘There was an increase of about fifty per cent. in the number of letters despatched from London on Thursday as compared with the previous Thursday, and a loss of about 500*l.* out of 1600*l.* in the total charges. The number of paid letters in the district post has increased from less than 9,000 to about 23,000; the number of unpaid letters remaining about the same as before, viz., 32,000. No doubt the increase is greater at present than it will be in a day or two, as comparatively few letters were written the day before the reduction; still the result is as yet satisfactory. The Chancellor of the Exchequer thinks very much so.

‘*December 7th.*—As I expected, the number of letters

yesterday was less than on Thursday ; the increase as compared with the previous Friday being about twenty-five per cent. only.'

Of course, when it was found that the immediate increase was so very moderate, the moment had arrived for exultation in those who had predicted failure ; and, like Sir Fretful Plagiary, I was fortunate enough to have more than one "damned good-natured friend" to keep me sufficiently informed of the jubilation—which, however, did not daunt me much.

Whilst, as I have said, angry voices arose at the limited extent of the first reduction, there were at least some persons who, being out of the reach of general information, received the change much as I had once hoped the whole public would do, viz., as a great and unexpected boon. A poor Irishman, for instance, who brought a letter to the Chief Office, with one shilling and fourpence for the postage, upon having the shilling returned to him, with the information that the fourpence was all that was required, broke out in acknowledgment to the window-clerk with a "God bless your honour, and thank you."

About a week after the change, I had the satisfaction of hearing from Messrs. Bokenham and Smith, the two heads of the Circulation Department, as follows :—

'*Journal, December 13th.*—Bokenham says they do not put more than one letter in twenty into the scale, and that a greater saving than he expected results from uniformity of rate ; that the increased number of letters has required no increase of strength. Smith gives a similar account (he has two additional men). Both laugh at the notion of the insecurity in the delivery as resulting from prepayment.'

Three days later, I proposed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the penny rate should come into operation in three weeks from that day ; the prepay-

ment to be made in money until the stamps, now in preparation, could be issued; and the abolition of franking to take place as soon as prepayment should be made compulsory. Mr. Baring approved generally of the plan, but preferred to extend the time to a month, and to abolish franking at once; the former modification being of little moment, the latter, as may be inferred from the event, a very judicious change.

Two days afterwards—that we might complete the necessary arrangements without loss of time—the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on leaving Downing Street, took me with him to his house at Lee, where, after dining, we set to work, and, continuing without interruption, finished our task about one in the morning. When I rose to retire, somewhat fatigued with my long day's work, I observed, to my surprise, that my host, opening his Treasury box, began to take out papers as if for immediate examination. Upon my expressing surprise, and a hope that he was not going to work more that night, he told me that he should not sleep till all were dealt with. If I had ever supposed that Chancellors of the Exchequer had an easy life, I had abundant opportunity, now and afterwards, for disabuse.

Much objection was raised at the Post Office to the establishment of the penny rate before the issue of stamps; especially if coupled with the rule requiring double rate when the postage was paid on delivery of the letter, which would of course tend, as it was meant to do, to make prepayment the general practice; but, after a good deal of discussion, in which Mr. Baring supported my views, all objection was withdrawn, and the 10th January, 1840, was finally determined upon as the day when penny postage should be established throughout the whole kingdom.

At this same conference, I proposed that the scale of weight, as applied to high-priced letters (foreign and colonial), should ascend throughout by the half-ounce. Mr. Baring was favourable to this arrangement, but it was abandoned for the time at the desire of Colonel Maberly, who maintained that trouble would arise from the minuteness of the grade; and, in fact, was not adopted till more than twenty years afterwards.

Meanwhile, the examination of the multitudinous devices for producing an inimitable stamp having at length been completed, I was called on to prepare a minute on the whole subject, preparatory to issuing orders for the execution of the work. The mode of proceeding in such cases may surprise the uninitiated as much as, in the outset, it had surprised me. By this time, however, I had fallen into the routine. Accordingly, I put my own views on the matter, modified by what I had gathered in conversation with my official superior, into the mouths of “*My Lords,*” submitting the draft to the Chancellor of the Exchequer for his comments, in accordance with which I altered again and again until he was satisfied; soon learning that when this point was gained, the consent of “*My Lords*” was as prompt and certain as the facing of a company at the command of the captain.

Few fictions, I suppose, are more complete than the minutes purporting to describe the proceedings of the Treasury Board. There was certainly a large and handsome room containing a suitable table headed with a capacious arm-chair, the back bearing a crown, and the seat prepared, as I was informed, for the reception of the sovereign, whose visits, however, scarcely seemed to be frequent, as the garniture was in rags. On this table, according to the minutes, the Chancellor laid such and such papers, making

such and such remarks; sometimes the First Lord of the Treasury appeared as taking a part, though only on occasions of some little importance, such, for instance, as my appointment; then deliberation seemed to follow, certain conclusions to be arrived at, and corresponding instructions to be given: a goodly appearance on paper, while the simple fact was that two or three Junior Lords being seated for form's sake, papers were read over which were to go forth as the resultant minutes of the said meeting, but which, having all been prepared beforehand, had received the signature of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or of one of the Secretaries of the Treasury, the attending Lords giving their assent, as a matter of course, without a moment's thought or hesitation. Once, indeed, while I was yet very new, I did venture to go so far as to inquire, in language which caution made somewhat enigmatical, whether I was to complete the minute then in hand before it received the confirmation of the Board; nor shall I readily forget the look of perplexity which followed the question. When my meaning was at length perceived, such answer was given that the inquiry never had to be repeated.

With regard, however, to the competing plans, though valuable suggestions were afforded by several, no one was deemed sufficient in itself; and adjudication ended in selecting, from the whole number of competitors, four who had rendered most service, and in dividing the offered reward amongst them, in equal shares; thus giving 100*l.* to each. The successful candidates were: Messrs. Bogardus and Coffin (who had acted together), Mr. Benjamin Cheverton, Mr. Henry Cole, and Mr. Charles Whiting.

By this minute, the plan of prepayment was at length definitely adopted, as was also the use of

stamps; and this in the three forms which I had recommended before the Treasury issued their invitation for suggestions; together with the addition recommended at the same time, that stamps should be impressed upon paper of any kind sent to the Stamp Office by the public.

It was also ordered that the penny rate should be adopted forthwith; the stamps to be introduced as soon as they could be got ready. Charge by weight having been previously adopted, there was now added the rule doubling the charge on letters not paid for in advance.

Some change, also, in the same general direction was made in the postage even of foreign letters.

The Queen having been graciously pleased (and here the words were no mere form) to abandon her privilege of franking, thus submitting her letters to the same rule as those of her humblest subject, it was determined that all other such privilege should cease at the same time. And here it may be observed, that though the obligation now extended to all Government offices, viz., to have their letters taxed like those of private persons, might seem to be only formal, since their so-called payment of postage was little more than matter of account between one department and another, yet, as no department likes to see its postage charge in excess, it constituted, in effect, to a considerable extent, a real check. At the same time it was essential for showing the real earnings of the Post Office

On parliamentary papers, hitherto free, a postage was established at the rate of one penny for two ounces; but, some weeks later, on the representation of members, the allowance of weight was doubled.

In anticipation of a large influx of letters, it was ordered that, for a time, the free receipt of letters at

the London offices should cease one hour earlier than before, with a corresponding arrangement at the country offices; the anticipation there to vary from one hour to half an hour, as might be deemed needful by the District Surveyor; but the time for the receipt of late letters, everywhere and in all cases, extending to as late an hour as before.

This minute, after revision and re-revision by Mr. Baring, Colonel Maberly, and myself, having, at length, been adopted, and published in the newspapers, a warrant to the same effect was prepared for the *Gazette*, and signed by Lord Melbourne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Mr. (afterwards Sir Thomas) Wyse. As the minute gives in detail the reasons for the conclusions arrived at, and thus illustrates an important part of the history, I give it entire in the Appendix (C). Upon looking over the warrant the next day, however, I discovered an error; the privilege relative to the letters of soldiers and sailors, which it had been intended to continue in full, being therein limited to letters inwards. This omission, as the three signatories had in the mean time left town, and delay was inadmissible, placed me in an unpleasant dilemma; so that I had either quietly to see the inadvertent establishment of a temporary restriction of a valued privilege, or to take upon myself—a subordinate of but two months' standing—to alter the terms of a Treasury warrant. After much hesitation I ventured on the bolder alternative, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on learning the facts, frankly gave me his thanks.

The warrant appeared in a supplementary *Gazette* the same evening, December 28; and this is the last event I have to mention in the year 1839, the third of the penny postage movement.

A question soon arose as to the hour for posting newspapers, a subject accidentally omitted in the

minute. Here I may observe that, though I was constantly striving to anticipate all contingencies, and that for the most part with good success, it would now and then occur that something escaped observation, and that in a minute elaborately framed to meet all cases, some little flaw would still appear, to give trouble. Often, however, the explanation was that a draft liable to extraneous modification would sometimes be materially changed by the substitution of a phrase, which, without careful comparison with the whole document, seemed a just equivalent for that which it replaced.

Here, however, as already said, was certainly an omission; I supposing that no change would be made in respect of newspapers, while Colonel Maberly considered these as included in the term letters. While we were discussing the point before the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Colonel Maberly contending that the restriction would be indispensable, I urging that it would be very unpopular, we were interrupted by the Chancellor, who meantime had been opening his letters, and now suddenly exclaimed, "My Exchequer Bills are at one per cent. premium; so I don't care for a little unpopularity." And thus the matter ended.

All being resolved upon, we did not hold it necessary to pursue the cautious policy observed on some previous occasions, but took means to make the coming change as widely known as practicable. Accordingly, a form of notification having been agreed upon, I ordered half a million of copies to be printed, and at the same time inserted a short advertisement in every newspaper throughout the kingdom.

On the day before that appointed for the establishment of Penny Postage, came information as to the effect of the fourpenny rate, showing that the numerical increase in the letters affected by the reduction,

was for England and Wales 33 per cent., for Scotland 51, and for Ireland 52; the increase on the whole being 36 per cent.

At length the great day arrived. I give, with one addition, the relative passages from my journal for that day and the three following:—

‘*January 10.*—Penny Postage extended to the whole kingdom this day! Very able articles on the subject in the *Chronicle*, *Advertiser*, and *Globe*. The Tory papers for the most part sulky. *Standard* abusive of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. * * * The Chancellor of the Exchequer much pleased with Matthew’s admirable article on postage in the ‘*Edinburgh Review*,’ published yesterday.

I have abstained from going to the Post Office to-night lest I should embarrass their proceedings. I hear of large numbers of circulars being sent, and the *Globe* of to-night says the Post Office has been quite besieged by people prepaying their letters. I guess that the number despatched to-night will not be less than 100,000, or more than three times what it was this day twelvemonths. If less I shall be disappointed.

‘*January 11.*—The number of letters despatched last night exceeded all expectation. It was 112,000, of which all but 13,000 or 14,000 were prepaid. Great confusion in the hall of the Post Office, owing to the insufficiency of means for receiving the postage. The number received this morning was nearly 80,000, part, of course, at the old rate. Mr. Baring is in high spirits. It cannot be expected, however, that this great number will be sustained at present.

‘*January 13.*—As was expected, the number of letters despatched on Saturday was less than on Friday. It was about 70,000. I did not expect so great a falling off.’

I must not omit to mention that I received a large number of letters—mostly from strangers—but all dated on this, the opening day, thanking me for the great boon of Penny Postage.

‘*January 14.*—The number of letters yesterday somewhat increased. About 90,000 each way. Mr. Baring, on my report that many persons were unable to get to the windows

to post their letters in time, promised to write to Mr. D. W. Harvey, the superintendent of police, to direct that the thoroughfares may be kept clear.'

It is a whimsical fact that for this difficulty of access to the office windows, which continued for some days, and against which I, of course, had no direct, and little indirect, power of providing, some of the Tory papers held me fairly open to attack. On the other hand, I learnt that on the first evening of the penny rate, notwithstanding the crush and inconvenience, three hearty cheers were given in the great hall for Rowland Hill, followed by three others for the officers of the department.

Further, on the 16th of the month, came the second mention of my plan in a Queen's Speech; the words being as follows:—

'I have lost no time in carrying into effect the intentions of Parliament by the reduction of the duties on postage, and I trust that the beneficial effects of this measure will be felt throughout all classes of the community.'*

* 'Hansard,' vol. li. p. 4.

CHAPTER VII.

STAMPS. (1840.)

As the arrangements for printing the stamps advanced it became apparent that it would be necessary to appoint some well qualified person to superintend the process, manage the machinery, &c. My thoughts naturally turned to my brother Edwin; and my recommendation being favourably received, and the consequent inquiries being answered as satisfactorily as I was well assured they must be, the Chancellor of the Exchequer informed me, about a fortnight later, that he had made the appointment. The salary he mentioned was 500*l.* or 600*l.* a year; but, at my brother's wish, I informed him that the smaller sum would be preferred, provided that the sacrifice might avail to secure him efficient assistance; an arrangement to which the Chancellor readily consented. This appointment promised no small relief to me; as hitherto much of the time urgently demanded for more important business had been necessarily given to merely mechanical arrangements, since I could not and did not find in uninterested persons those zealous efforts and that watchful care which were essential to combined rapidity and security.

Much, however, still, and indeed for a long time afterwards, inevitably devolved upon me, which

would be commonly supposed to be altogether out of my range. Naturally I was regarded by everybody as responsible for an innovation made on my advice; and it would be beyond measure tedious to describe, or even enumerate, the efforts and precautions for which I was called upon to give efficiency to the operation of my plan, and at the same time secure it against that various trickery to which innovation necessarily opens the door. Of course, too, each novelty in proceeding was admitted with more or less difficulty. Thus, for instance, though it was obviously desirable that the paper to be used as covers should, before issuing, be cut into the proper shape (previous folding was not yet thought of, no machinery existing for the purpose), yet that preliminary was objected to, because of the additional trouble it would give, not only in cutting, but also in counting; and it really cost me a considerable portion of three several days, to say nothing of some trial of temper, to carry the point.

Towards the end of the following month, Mulready's design, together with the stamps intended for Post Office use, was formally approved; and of this design I may remark, that though it subsequently brought so much ridicule on the artist and his employers, yet it was regarded very favourably, before issuing, by the Royal Academicians, to whom it was presented when they assembled in council on April 10th of this year. Neither is the discrepancy hard to explain, since that which is really beautiful so often wearies by endless repetition. To close the subject, I will mention here, by anticipation, that the public rejection was so complete as to necessitate the destruction of nearly all the vast number prepared for issue; and it is a curious fact that a machine had to be constructed for the purpose; the attempt to do the work by fire in close stoves (for fear of ab-

straction forbade the use of open ones) having absolutely failed.

The error made in this provision was not the only one; since, as appears by a Treasury Minute of January 28, the use of the adhesive stamp, which has now almost driven out the others, was still expected to be very limited.

Of course my watch on the number of letters was unceasing, the result being very variable; sometimes encouraging, and sometimes so unsatisfactory as to cause me no small uneasiness; a feeling not much soothed by information that the plan, as I was informed in confidence by Mr. Gordon (Secretary to the Treasury), was already pronounced at the Post Office a total failure.

On March 12th the first parliamentary return on the subject was obtained; when it appeared that the increase in the number of chargeable letters was somewhat less than two and a quarter-fold. Certainly I had expected more, and was obliged, in my disappointment, to fall back on my general confidence in the soundness of my views, deriving, however, some encouragement from finding that the average postage, instead of being only $1\frac{1}{4}d.$, as I had calculated, proved to be nearly $1\frac{1}{2}d.$; a difference which, however trifling in appearance, would, when multiplied, as it already had to be, by a hundred and fifty millions, tell sensibly in the result. This, also, enabled me to correct my calculation as to the increase in the number of letters necessary to sustain the gross revenue; which I now reduced from five-fold to four and three-quarters-fold; a reduction fully justified eleven years later by the result.*

At length, preparations being sufficiently advanced, a Treasury Minute of April 22nd, followed by a warrant to the same effect, appointed the 6th of the

* 'First Report of the Postmaster-General,' pp. 65-68.

following month as the day when prepayment by stamps should begin ; the alternative of prepayment in money being left for the present, so as to allow time for the public to fall quietly into the new practice. Mr. Baring, indeed, having but little faith in the expected preference of the public for stamps, offered to promote their use by making them the only means of prepayment ; but, independently of my confidence in their acceptability, I preferred that the two modes, money and stamps, should contend for public favour on equal terms.

A difficulty, however, arose here, for which I was quite unprepared, and which may still excite wonder ; objection being raised in the department to the sale of stamps at the three Chief Offices, viz., of London, Dublin and Edinburgh. I can only suppose that official dignity was touched, the feeling excited being such as might arise on board a man-of-war at a proposal to intrude bales of merchandise on “ Her Majesty’s Quarter-deck.”

The issue of stamps, however, began, as appointed, on the 1st of May. Great, I had the satisfaction of hearing, was the bustle at the Stamp Office ; the sale on this one day amounting to 2500*l*. It was clear, therefore, that this practice, so “ inconvenient and foreign to the habits of Englishmen,” was at least to have trial. So far all was well ; but now began a series of troubles, against which I had striven to provide, but necessarily through the instrumentality of others little interested in their prevention.

Six days later, I received information that no stamps had been issued to any of the receiving-houses in London. On inquiring into the cause of this omission, I found that in the Treasury letter, giving instructions on the subject, the important word *not* had been omitted, so that whereas the minute directed that the issue should not be delayed

on account of certain preliminaries the letter directed that it should.

Two days later, a new difficulty appeared. The objection raised at the Stamp Office to the cutting up of the whole sheets into single covers, had prevented the construction of proper machinery for the purpose; and now a contest arose between two departments, the Stamp Office persisting in issuing the sheets uncut, and the Post Office very properly refusing to supply its receivers with them until cut. The consequence of this antagonism, combined with public exigence, was that the cutting had to be carried on throughout the following Sunday. I secured, however, an additional machine for the Monday, and the promise of another for the Wednesday. Nevertheless, the delay produced considerable dissatisfaction; the stamps issued having fallen, to a great extent, into the hands of private venders, who naturally took advantage of the demand to sell at a profit.

A week later, the issue threatened to come to a standstill; the Post Office, though it had in writing undertaken the duty of distributing the stamped covers, now declaring such distribution beyond its power. My inquiries merely produced a repetition of this declaration; the nature of the obstacle I failed to learn. As I was unwilling to call in the authority of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who, indeed, at this time was so much occupied as to be almost inaccessible, I could but urge and remonstrate; and it was some time before this produced the desired effect. Even a month after the first issue, the London receivers remained still unsupplied, the Post Office alleging that it could not obtain stamps, and the Stamp Office declaring that it had complied, and more than complied, with all requisitions. The only thing beyond doubt was that blame rested somewhere; but where, it was hard to

discover ; the more so, as each department was too much out of temper to allow of easy interrogation. I scarcely need add that troubles more or less similar to these continued to arise from time to time.

Meanwhile, the actual production could scarcely keep pace with the public demand ; the less so as this took the unexpected form already implied ; adhesive stamps so fast rising in preference, that the great stock of covers which had been prepared proved of comparatively little value. The presses actually at work were producing more than half a million of stamps per day, but this was insufficient, and sudden addition was not practicable, since, by a relay of hands, the work was already carried on by night and by day without intermission. Of course, such pressure was not without its evils ; some of the work being inaccurately and even carelessly executed, so that I began to fear that forgery might be successfully attempted ; a fear, however, which happily proved groundless ; only two attempts, so far as I know, ever having been made, and both of a very bungling character, though in one the author was cunning enough to escape personal detection. In the other, which occurred in Ireland, the offender was convicted and punished ; the detection occurring in consequence of a young man's writing to his sweetheart under one of the forged stamps, and enclosing another for her use in reply.

Amidst these anxieties, another arose which proved far more durable and more troublesome. This proceeded from the difficulty of making the obliteration of the stamp complete and effectual. All the penny stamps, it must be observed, including the pictorial cover, were at this time printed in black ; the obliterating ink being red ; used, I suppose, because that colour had long been employed to indicate prepayment.

Of course the danger was, first, lest obliteration should be omitted; and, secondly, lest the effacing marks should afterwards be removed. Even on the first point there was a good deal to complain of in the outset; so much that a certain amount of discredit began to attach to stamps as a whole. The Post Office replied to complaints by saying that every care was taken; and no doubt serious difficulties would arise in introducing a new mode, where so many persons were concerned; these, too, being spread far and wide over the kingdom. Even where absolute omission was avoided the obliteration was often very incomplete. I observed that the obliterating stamp used at the General Post Office was badly constructed, and requested Mr. Bokenham to try another which I had had prepared. This he undertook to do; indeed he appeared anxious to get the work well done, but complained of the stupidity of the clerks and deputy-postmasters.

An extract from my journal, a few days later, shows how matters were getting on:—

‘*May 21st.*—Several more cases of stamps wholly unobliterated, or very nearly so, have come within my knowledge; and all sorts of tricks are being played by the public, who are exercising their ingenuity in devising contrivances for removing the oblitative stamp, by chemical agents and other means. One contrivance is to wash over the stamp, before the letter is posted, with isinglass, or something else which acts as a varnish, and as the obliterating stamp falls on this varnish, it is easily removed with soap and water. Tricks of this kind are quite sufficiently numerous to produce great annoyance; but I doubt whether it is more than the exercise of a little ingenuity which will speedily be directed to other objects. I am making every effort, however, with the aid of Phillips, the chemist,* and others, to prevent these frauds, and I trust I shall succeed.’

Seven days later I find the following entry:—

* The late Professor R. Phillips, F.R.S.

‘*May 28th.*—To-day Lord John Russell sent a blank sheet of paper, which some impudent fellow had addressed to him, using a label which had evidently been used before, for the features were entirely washed away. Nevertheless, it was passed at the Post Office. Whiting, the printer, also sent a note his brother had received from Brighton, the stamp of which was so slightly obliterated that the mark was scarcely visible, and by night would almost certainly pass.’

This took me next day to the Post Office, where I remained with Mr. Cole during the two busiest hours of the day, witnessing operations. I give the following extract :—

‘*May 29th.*—The tricks with the stamps are, Mr. Bokenham says, abating, and practically he thinks there is no danger of their being used twice, now that ink for obliteration has been supplied to the deputy postmasters from the Central Office—a measure which I advised in the first instance.’

Nevertheless, more than a fortnight later, I find the following entry :—

‘Pressly* assured me that he continually receives letters the stamps of which have not been cancelled. That he has sent them so frequently to Colonel Maberly that he does not like to send any more, lest it should be thought annoying. He gave me one recently received.’

Meantime, as the red ink seemed inefficacious, black ink was tried; and, for a time, this appeared to be effectual.

Additional security was also sought in legislation; advantage being taken by Mr. Timm, the Solicitor to the Stamp Office, of a bill then preparing on postal affairs, to introduce a clause enabling the Postmaster-General to open any letter bearing a forged stamp, or a stamp used for the second time; but as the Chancellor of the Exchequer felt sure that Parliament would not grant such a power, the clause, very

* Now Sir Charles Pressly, K.C.B. He was then Secretary, and afterwards Chairman, of the Board of Stamps and Taxes.

much to Mr. Timm's regret and my own, was struck out.

We were, therefore, thrown back upon chemical and mechanical means of defence; and it soon appeared that these must be put into further requisition; Mr. Donovan, a chemist of Dublin, having succeeded in removing the effacing black without injuring the stamp below. This paradoxical operation is explained by the fact that the latter had been impressed by powerful machinery, and likewise had had time to dry; while the former was produced only by hand and remained fresh.

Again, therefore, I had to call in Mr. Phillips. He came accompanied by Dr. Clark, Professor of Chemistry in the University of Aberdeen, who had kindly volunteered his services, and who suggested a number of experiments, which Mr. Phillips undertook to try. Dr. Clark, also, about three weeks later, being then about to leave for Manchester, undertook, in connection with friends among the calico-printers of that town, to try some experiments on a new principle of obliteration; an offer which of course I thankfully accepted.

On the same day, however, Mr. Phillips reported favourably of a new kind of ink devised by a Mr. Parsons, informing me, nevertheless, that it had yet to be subjected to various tests.

At this juncture came a formal report from the Post Office, stating that the red ink was found to be removable, and asking for instructions. The statement, though necessarily made as a matter of form, came to me as a mere truism; but the request for instructions was more easily made than complied with; for about the same time Mr. Parsons' ink yielded to the skill of Messrs. Perkins and Co., contractors for the supply of adhesive stamps; who, however, reported in turn, that they had prepared two

other kinds of ink, either of which they thought would answer the purpose. I lost no time in setting Mr. Phillips to work on the subject; and, in my anxiety, went so far as to trouble the greatest chemist of the age. Kindly giving me the needful attention, though in an extremely depressed state of health, the result of excessive labour—a fact, of course, unknown to me when I made my application—Mr. Faraday approved of the course which I submitted to him, viz., that an aqueous ink should be used, both for the stamps and for obliteration, so soon as the stock of stamps now on hand should be exhausted, and that, in the mean time, obliteration should be made with black printing-ink. As the stock of covers was so large that, considering its little favour with the public, it was likely to last some years; and as, in dealing with those, an oleaginous effacing ink was indispensable, while, nevertheless, it would be impracticable to have two kinds of effacing ink in use at the same time, it was important to procure a destructible oleaginous ink to be used meanwhile in printing the adhesive stamps; and I accordingly requested Mr. Phillips, and also Mr. Bacon, of the firm of Perkins and Co., to undertake the task; which they did.

The new oleaginous ink produced on the above application seemed at first to answer well; but past failure led me to doubt present results. Meantime, endless suggestions were coming from various quarters, all requiring to be more or less considered, and many plausible enough to deserve trial, but all ending, sooner or later, in failure. The worry of this continued succession of hope and disappointment made me at last almost afraid to enter my office; where I foreknew that some untoward report must be awaiting me.

At length I drew up a long and elaborate Report,

containing all the information then possessed, and recommending, for the present, obliteration with good black printing-ink, prepared in a peculiar manner, and the printing of the adhesive stamps in coloured inks—blue, as before, for the twopenny ones, but red for the penny ones; both colours, however, to be oleaginous, but at the same time destructible; my aim being to render the obliteration so much more tenacious than the postage stamp that any attempt at removing the former must involve the destruction of the latter.

The new labels being thus far provided for, anxiety remained as to the stock of all kinds still on hand. It was still hoped, however, that thoroughly good printer's-ink would answer the purpose sufficiently to prevent any serious abuse; but within three weeks from the date of my Report, a chemist named Watson had succeeded completely in the removal of this obliteration also. His process, however, though very simple, inexpensive, and effectual in relation, at least, to the black stamp, proved so slow as to demand nine minutes per label in its application; so that the danger to be apprehended was not very formidable. To prevent even this, however, Mr. Watson proposed an obliterating ink which he regarded as quite irremovable. So indeed it proved; but nevertheless its use was inadmissible, because it both injured the paper and obliterated the writing in its neighbourhood.

Mr. Watson's attempts to remove the black ink from the red stamp seemed, after an interval of some weeks, to succeed; but, fortunately, the success proved to be fallacious; nor, so far as I am aware, has practical success been subsequently achieved by any one; so that the mode then adopted still remains in satisfactory use.

Still, however, temporary difficulties remained, and, yet worse, increased: the process of removing black from black, which Mr. Watson could carry on

but slowly, my clerk, Mr. Ledingham, whose ingenuity had dealt effectually with many previous devices, succeeded in carrying on at the rate of one per minute; a rate quite quick enough to make knavery very profitable. After much thought I hit upon a device which is thus recorded in my journal:—

‘*November 9th.*—It occurred to me that as the means which were successful in removing the printing-ink obliterated were different from those which discharged Perkins’s ink, a secure ink might perhaps be obtained by simply mixing the two, and some trials made to day lead me to hope that this plan will succeed. Perhaps certain ingredients of Perkins’s ink, added to the printing-ink, would do equally well.’

This device succeeded; the ink so formed proving to be indestructible. Now, at length, all seemed to be right; but one more difficulty yet remained. To enable this ink to dry with sufficient rapidity, it had been necessary to introduce a small quantity of volatile oil; and the smell thus produced was declared at the Post Office to be intolerable. Happily, means were soon found for removing the offence; and so, at length, a little before the close of the year, all requirements were met.

But the most grievous trouble that arose to me in connection with these cares remains to be told. When, from the causes already shown, and others yet to be described, I was almost overborne with labour and anxiety, there came a new trouble for which I was quite unprepared; and which, like the last straw, was enough to break the camel’s back. A blow aimed at my brother was a precursor of what subsequently befel myself, though with a difference that will presently appear. Before proceeding, I am bound to mention that, at a later period, and after time had brought about some personal change at the Stamp Office, everything was done to make amends for this wrong. My brother’s services were fully, nay,

handsomely recognised, his powers greatly extended, and his emoluments enlarged; a sequel, however, which of course I could not then foresee.

Journal, June 29th.—A letter has been addressed by the Commissioners of Stamps and Taxes to the Treasury, setting forth, and greatly exaggerating, the exertions of its own officers with regard to the postage stamps, saying not a word of Edwin's exertions, which have been much greater than those of any one else, but adding that as, from the unpopularity of the covers and envelopes, it will probably be unnecessary to manufacture any more, and as certain arrangements which they propose can be adopted with regard to the labels and stamped paper, it will be unnecessary to employ Edwin any longer. The fact is, that they are utterly ignorant of machinery and of the difficulties it presents, and are consequently unable to appreciate Edwin's peculiar powers. In their opinion the whole difficulty consists in the distribution of the stamps and in going through certain forms for their registration. At the very moment that they propose to dispense with his services, Edwin is applying counters to Barnes' presses, is improving the presses to be employed in stamping the paper of the public (which before he took them in hand were for this purpose quite worthless), and is preparing one of a superior construction. If the business is left in the hands of the Commissioners without such aid as Edwin gives, my opinion is that we shall soon be in a mess.'

After some delay, arising from the Chancellor of the Exchequer's close occupation, I succeeded in laying the case fully before him. He at once expressed agreement in my view of the question, and the result was that, happily alike for my brother and for the public convenience, five months later the obnoxious letter was withdrawn; and my brother, though for a time subjected to more or less of annoyance, was never afterwards disturbed in his office. On the contrary, some years later his superintendence, originally confined to the postage department, was extended to the whole stamping system—a comprehension rendered more practicable, I may observe,

by the aid of his son, Mr. Ormond Hill. Under their joint care the machinery originally devised for postal purposes was extended to stamps generally, and improved mechanical appliances were introduced throughout the department. The great advantage thus obtained, in point of economy, despatch and excellence of work, has been several times noticed, with approbation, in the Annual Reports of the Commissioners of Inland Revenue, extracts from which will be found in the Appendix (D.); and I learn that, but for these improvements, the stamping of receipts and bankers' cheques, the number of which averages about a hundred and sixty thousand per day—being also liable to great variation—would have required an extensive enlargement of the premises and a considerable increase of the working staff; which, on the contrary, was, through a skilful use of the union of the two departments, brought into more efficient and economical organisation than ever before.

Before leaving the subject of stamps, I must say a few words about the form in which the adhesive stamps are printed, and the mode of their production. It may be necessary to inform those who buy stamps only in small quantities—probably the great mass of her Majesty's subjects—that the whole sheet of penny stamps contains two hundred and forty, the equivalent of course of 1*l.*; and that as each row contains twelve stamps, the 1*l.* is easily divisible into shillings, while the shillings, in like manner, may be promptly reduced to pieces worth respectively sixpence, fourpence, twopence or a single penny. In the outset it was foreseen that the stamps might be used in ordinary payments; and it may be added that the currency thus introduced bears some resemblance—though the comparison is much in its favour—to an expedient practised long ago at the Bank of England. I

learn from Mr. Hunt, late Governor of that institution, that in its early days notes were frequently presented for partial payment, such payment being recorded on the note, which then returned to circulation, passing at a diminished value. The same gentleman informs me that there is to this day such an outstanding note of the date of 1697, which if presented would be redeemed by the payment of sixpence.

As regards the production of stamps, it must be premised that two qualities were indispensable; first, cheapness; secondly, security against imitation. To obtain this latter quality, it was necessary to have excellence both of design and of workmanship, together with exact uniformity in the whole number issued—requirements which made extreme cheapness difficult.

The Queen's head was first engraved by hand on a single matrix; the effigy being encompassed with lines too fine for any hand, or even any but the most delicate machinery to engrave. The matrix being subsequently hardened, was employed to produce impressions on a soft steel roller of sufficient circumference to receive twelve; and this being hardened in turn, was used, under very heavy pressure, to produce and repeat its counterpart on a steel-plate, to such extent that this, when used in printing, produced at each impression two hundred and forty stamps; all this being of course done, as machinists will at once perceive, according to the process invented by the late Mr. Perkins.

In this manner there were produced in the first fifteen years more than three thousand millions of stamps; all, as being derived from the same matrix, of course absolutely uniform. At the end of that time it was thought desirable to create a second matrix, but as this was obtained by transfer from the

first—save that the lines were deepened by hand—the deviation from identity was at most very slight. With plates procured from this, the process however being somewhat modified, there had been printed, up to July, 1867, more than seven thousand millions of stamps; thus making up a total of considerably more than ten thousand millions, in all of which the impression is, for all practical purposes, absolutely uniform.

Now it will easily be perceived that, if imitation cannot be effected without resort to the means described above, as used in the production of the stamps, forgery is in effect impracticable; since no forger can have the command of very powerful, delicate, and therefore costly machinery, requiring for its management skilful, and therefore highly-paid workmen. If the Queen's head alone constituted the effigy, something in imitation might be done by the aid of lithography, or some other such copying process; but this fails when applied to the extremely delicate lines already mentioned as constituting the background; which in the lithographer's hands do but smirch the paper.

Another difficulty is thrown in the way of the forger by the letters placed at the four corners of each stamp; which will be found to vary in every one of the two hundred and forty impressions comprised in a sheet; the necessary modification being made in each steel-plate by means of a hand punch. By this arrangement the forger is compelled either to resort to the like complexity or to issue his counterfeits in single stamps, all identical in their lettering; a proceeding which, if carried to any remunerative extent, would inevitably lead to detection. Of the additional security derived from the use of a portrait in the stamp, an advantage long ago recognised in coinage, it will suffice to remark

that of all depictions a portrait is perhaps the one in which change, however slight, is most easily discovered, especially by those who have it continually before their eye. We all know that no strange face could have more than a moment's chance of passing for that of a familiar friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUBSIDIARY PROCEEDINGS.

CONCURRENTLY with all these transactions, many and various matters, some of them of great importance, demanded attention. As letters multiplied, so also, to my surprise and concern, did complaints relative to theft; and that in a much greater ratio. This, as I eventually learnt, was consequent upon a change at the Post Office; made, unluckily, without notification to the Treasury. A wholesome practice had previously existed of registering every letter supposed to contain articles of value; but, under the pressure caused by the increase of letters, this precaution had been abandoned. Of course, the remedy was to revive it; but here difficulties arose. No fee had previously been charged; and now that it was rightly thought necessary that the trouble of registration should be paid for, a question arose as to what the charge should be; the rates proposed by the Post Office, viz., one shilling for general post letters, and twopence for district post letters, seemed to me doubly objectionable; first, as to excess in the former of the two charges, and secondly, as to variety without sufficient reason; my wish being for a uniform rate, and that on no account higher than sixpence. This difference of opinion, combined with extreme difficulty of access to the ever-occupied

Chancellor of the Exchequer, delayed the measure; but at length, thinking it better to obtain what I could, in the hope of subsequent improvement, I gave way so far as to agree to a uniform rate of one shilling; and procured for that measure the approbation of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

As another means of diminishing theft, I proposed a reduction of the fee for money orders; and, with the approbation of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, this was carried into effect; the rates being reduced from 6*d.* to 3*d.* for any sum not exceeding 2*l.*; and from 1*s.* 6*d.* to 6*d.* for any higher sum up to 5*l.* This reduction, combined with the low postage charged on transmission, had the effect of increasing the number of money-orders in ten years by more than twenty-fold.*

Another matter was the reduction of rates on ship-going letters. Though the Chancellor of the Exchequer was not inclined to enter on the discussion of new measures till after the close of the present session of Parliament, he agreed to reduce the postage of letters to and from the North American Colonies to a general rate of 1*s.* 2*d.*, a great boon, at the time, to the British settlers and their friends.

This first measure was followed by several others; one of them relating to correspondence with Holland; though here, as elsewhere, negotiation was necessary to establish a just proportion between advantage and expense; the Dutch Government demanding that the division of receipts should be equal, while the whole expense of the packet service, besides conveyance over a greater extent of territory, was to fall upon us. This, I remember, led Mr. Baring to tell me an anecdote, not then generally known, relative to some unreasonable demand of the Dutch Government laid before Mr. Canning when

* 'First Report of Postmaster-General,' p. 66.

Foreign Minister, who, after perusing it, minuted the paper as follows :—

In matters of treaty the fault of the Dutch
Is giving too little and asking too much.

Attempts at reduction were also made in reference to correspondence with France; though for a time without success.

The most troublesome and unsatisfactory duty now devolving upon me was resistance to needless increase of expense. I found, with great concern, that augmentation was proceeding rapidly; and, indeed, the addition during the first year of penny postage amounted to something more than 100,000*l.*;* that, too, following an increase of 70,000*l.* in the previous year; an amount sufficient to produce a very serious injury to fiscal results, the whole of which I well knew would be, by many, attributed to my reform.

The increase was partly due to what was, in one point of view, an untoward coincidence, viz., the concurrent extension of the railway system. For though this tended greatly to the convenience of correspondents, and therefore to increase in the amount of correspondence, yet its effect in augmenting postal expenditure was quite startling. That an improvement which has so prodigiously cheapened the conveyance of passengers and goods should have greatly raised the cost of conveying the mails, however paradoxical, is demonstrably true; as indeed appears by the following simple statement.

The total charge for carrying the inland mails in the year 1835 (that before the writing of my pamphlet) was 225,920*l.*;† and it will be remembered that the mail-coaches were then so lightly loaded as to admit of a manifold increase in burden without much addition to their number. By the end of 1840,

* 'First Report of the Postmaster-General,' p. 68.

† See 'Post Office Reform,' second edition, p. 14.

when the number of chargeable letters had little more than doubled, while that of free missives must have greatly decreased, this charge had risen to 333,418*l.*,* and at the present time (1868) it appears to be as high as 718,480*l.*†

Of course, great benefit to the Post Office is derived from the vast increase in speed, and greater allowance of space; but while in all these the public has its full share, it enjoys at the same time that great reduction in expense, which contrasts so remarkably with the increased charge to the Post Office. To a limited extent, explanation is to be found in the loss of that immunity from tolls which in England all mail-coaches enjoyed on the old roads; but the main augmentation is attributable to circumstances which could not be considered without a too long digression. The increase was and is unquestionable; and the coincidence, as already implied, was misleading; giving an excellent handle to the enemies of the reform, and demanding of its friends a longer explanation than the public had time or inclination to follow.

A far less serious but more harassing increase of expense arose out of demands for augmented salaries, allowances, &c., which now poured in from all sides; and which came to the Treasury, backed by recommendation from the Post Office authorities; the Chief Office seeming never to question the judgment of the local surveyors, save when there appeared plausible ground for advising yet further augmentation. The reasons advanced were sometimes so insufficient that it was impossible for me, knowing the bitter hostility still entertained towards Penny Postage and its author, to avoid the suspicion that the care incumbent on such occasions was willingly set

* Finance Account for 1840.

† 'Fifteenth Report of the Postmaster-General,' p. 15.

aside; that increased expenditure was almost welcomed as a means of fulfilling adverse prediction.

Not the least remarkable were two cases afterwards stated in my evidence before a Parliamentary Committee.

Additional allowances to two postmasters (at Swinford and Ballaghaderin in Ireland) were proposed, on the ground that the money-order business had become so heavy that each postmaster was obliged to engage a clerk to attend to that duty alone. The accounts in the Post Office would of course have supplied a check to this statement; but it came to the Treasury vouched, first, by the surveyor of the district; second, by the Dublin office; and third, by the London office. The Treasury, at my suggestion, however, called for information as to the actual number of money-orders paid and issued by each office in a given time; and after the lapse of a year the information was supplied, when it appeared that the actual number of money-orders paid and issued, when taken together, was in one office only three per day, and in the other only two. I advised the rejection of the proposed allowances; but this question, with many others of a similar character, remained undecided when my duties were interrupted.*

I thus found myself engaged in a constant succession of petty contests, often unavailing, and always invidious; since, while ever called on to resist the demands of the undeserving, I was debarred, by my position, from originating any recommendation in favour of the deserving; a disadvantage under which I laboured for many years, and which seriously clogged my efforts for subsequent improvement.

The information, too, for rightly weighing these

* 'Report of the Select Committee on Postage, 1843,' p. 92.

various claims, though very accessible to the Post Office, was to me difficult and uncertain of attainment; since, in the investigation, I had of necessity to act through those to whom I stood opposed, and who were naturally unwilling to be found in the wrong. The plan, which after some experience I adopted, was as follows. I induced the Treasury to issue an instruction to the Postmaster-General that every application for increased force or salary at a provincial office should be accompanied with a detailed statement (in accordance with a printed form prepared by myself) of the work and expenditure of such office; and by making good use of these, I gradually arrived at averages which I used as guides in subsequent cases, and thus became enabled to exercise a salutary control. Doubtless many applications were altogether prevented by the conviction that the statement would not justify the demand: in some instances such statement was withheld on the plea of urgency; a move which was met by a temporary grant of force, to be made permanent if shown to be needful. Other modes were tried, but in the end lack of success effectually checked unwarranted attempts. I may add that the plan is still in use, is found to save much perplexity at the Post Office, and has operated beneficially in at once preventing needless expenditure and in enabling the Office to do prompt justice to well-founded claims.

Of reduced postage on colonial letters I have already spoken; but amongst the multifarious business referred to the Treasury by the Post Office, and with all of which I was called on to deal, there were other colonial matters, some of them perplexing enough; such, for instance, as to decide between two competing routes from Halifax to Quebec, and to take such measures as would enable French Canadians, whom

it was then peculiarly important to conciliate, to correspond with friends in their mother country on equal terms (as far as practicable) with Englishmen of the same colony.

I have already implied that movements were impeded, and labour increased, by difficulty of access to the Chancellor of the Exchequer; but it should be added that this went so far, especially during the parliamentary session, that pressing affairs were sometimes kept for weeks, and even months, awaiting his decision.

When, at length, the end of the session came, the exhausted minister felt the imperative demand for rest; and resolved to take six weeks' holiday. The reader who has accompanied me through the last three years will not wonder to find that I had a like requirement: I, therefore, requested and obtained leave of absence for the same period. What proportion of this furlough was available for its purpose to the Chancellor, I, of course, cannot exactly say; it is sufficient for me to speak for myself. As the difficulties relative to obliteration were still upon me, I should not have left town but from absolute necessity; and even in going I was obliged to make such arrangements as could scarcely fail of producing recal; knowing too, all the time, that even while I was away, many papers would of necessity be referred to me; so that, at best, my days of vacation would be but half-holidays.

Leaving home on August 14th, I got on pretty well for five days; when, amongst various papers, came the Postmaster-General's formal announcements relative to the failure of obliteration, with a request from the Chancellor of the Exchequer that I would report upon it. While I was dealing with this, I received, on the 21st, the notice that Mr. Parsons' obliterating ink had proved ineffectual; and my anxiety was so great, that though but a week of my

holiday was gone, I determined on an almost immediate return to town.

After nine days spent on the matter which had recalled me, and other business at my office, thinking matters now in tolerable train, I again left town; going, however, only to Ramsgate, that I might keep within call, and arranging to receive a daily report of progress. Altogether, I had this time an interval of twelve days, interrupted only by the daily receipt of papers which I could deal with where I was; but on September 13th I was again recalled:—

*‘Journal, September 13th, Sunday.—*Received a note from Mr. Gordon, stating that Lord Melbourne has applied to him for information as to the causes of the “continued and increasing deficiency of the Post Office revenue” (I think these are the words), and as to the future prospects, and requesting I will enable him to supply it with as little delay as possible. As I cannot, while at Ramsgate, give this information, or rather satisfy Lord Melbourne that the revenue is not decreasing in reality * * * I decided on returning at once to town, and came away by the packet at eleven o’clock.’

Four days were now occupied mainly in procuring the information thus called for, and in drawing up my Report on the subject; in which the increase in charges for conveyance had to take a conspicuous part; but on the 18th I again returned to Ramsgate; where fortunately I was able to remain until the 30th, my term of holiday having been considerably extended by a week, on account of interruptions.

I have already shown that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was working as hard as myself; abundant evidence of this might be produced from my journal, but I will give only one more extract:—

*‘December 24th.—*Saw the Chancellor of the Exchequer for “three minutes,” left with him, for Christmas Day reading, a long report on the new envelopes, a minute thereon, a form to be filled up in all cases in which application is made for advancing the expenses of any office, and some other papers.’

I have now little left to complete the history of this year. Among other expedients, I had recommended the introduction of what, from the particular form they have generally taken, are now usually called pillar-boxes; a plan which in its essential part I had seen in use in France some years before:—

‘*November 9th.*—A day or two ago there was a letter in the *Times* suggesting that a letter-box should be put up in Westminster Hall, for the convenience of the lawyers. I thought this a good opportunity to propose an experiment on my plan for having letter-boxes put up throughout London and other towns, in the great thoroughfares and other places of resort; the letters being taken out by the messengers now employed to collect from the receiving houses. Mr. Baring consents to the plan being tried in Westminster Hall: if successful it will add greatly to the public convenience (when extended), and will save some thousands a year in London alone.’

Mr. Baring’s consent was, I believe, acted upon; but I had accomplished little more in this direction, when the interruption occurred to which I have already adverted.

However, as the year of which I am now speaking (1840) advanced, increase in the number of letters began to show that steady progress which has never since been interrupted. Before the end of June this was pretty manifest, and by the middle of November progress was not only steady but rapid.

I insert here the following extracts from a letter received somewhat later from Captain Basil Hall:—

Portsmouth, Dec. 31, 1840.

MY DEAR SIR,

Many thanks for your agreeable information. Indeed I have no doubt—nor ever had—that your admirable invention (for it well deserves that name) will ere long make up the Post Office revenue to what it was. To say nothing of the enormous advantages which it brings along with it to all classes of the community!

* * * * *

It strikes me, too, that a great convenience might be added

to the envelopes if there were put a small lick of the gum which is used for the stamps at the angle where the wafer or wax is put ; so that an envelope might be closed without the trouble of a wafer or the double "toil and trouble" of a seal—implying lucifer-matches, tapers, and wax. I can easily see how one hundred, or any number of envelopes, might have this small touch of gum applied to them at a dash of a brush. But, indeed, the manufacture of envelopes—supposing Government were to take it in hand—would be so enormous that a small profit on each would realise a great sum. Every one now uses envelopes, which save a world of time, and if you were to furnish the means of closing the letter by an adhesive corner a still further saving of time would take place.

* * * * *

I dare say you are sadly bothered with crude suggestions ; but my heart is so completely in your noble scheme—the greatest of the day—that I venture to intrude occasionally.

Ever most truly yours,

BASIL HALL.

This is, so far as I am aware, the first mention of that now almost universal practice, which has nearly made wafers and sealing-wax things of the past.

On December 15th I first saw, in my brother Edwin's room at Somerset House, and in its earliest form—for he was as yet scarcely out of the first throes of invention—that folding machine, which was afterwards patented, which attracted so much attention at the first International Exhibition, and is now in constant and extensive use. In the model it already seemed to do its work very well, but the labour of some years was yet required to complete its adaptation to its purpose ; and in this latter part of the process my brother received important assistance from Mr. Warren De la Rue, who eventually purchased the patent.

The following passage shows that the close of the year was full of anxiety for that which was to follow :—

'*December 31st.*—The Post Office expenses are increasing at an enormous rate. As nearly as I can ascertain the present rate of expenditure is about 900,000*l.* per annum, which is an increase of more than 200,000*l.* in the last two years: the greater part of the increase results from the employment of railways, and cannot perhaps be avoided (though I think much may be done even there to reduce the charge), but a considerable portion is owing to the increase of establishments. In the first half of the present year the expenses of the several establishments were increased at the rate of about 20,000*l.* per annum, and I fear that at least an equal increase has taken place in the last half of the year. Nearly the whole of this increase of establishments might, I believe, have been avoided.'

Before closing the narrative of this year I may mention two or three incidents of an amusing character.

The following case, among many others, was referred to me: The writer of a letter, not having a penny stamp at hand, had attached thereto one half of a twopenny stamp—cut in two for the purpose. Upon finding that his letter had, nevertheless, been treated as unpaid, he had applied to the Post Office, and, failing there, actually gone so far as to memorialise the Treasury. Of course, I could only recommend that the previous judgment should be confirmed, which was accordingly done. Some years afterwards I had to deal, in a matter of private business, with a gentleman who, as I believe, was the writer of this whimsical memorial. If any hasty inference had been drawn from my first passage with him it was more than set aside by the second; for in this his conduct was not only kind but liberal.

Soon after the issue of the adhesive stamp, a distinguished connoisseur, reading the injunction to affix the stamp "on the right-hand side of the letter," felt a doubt as to what the injunction might really mean. Being in the artistic habit of reversing sides

in speaking of pictures, and probably having done so in the case of Mulready's beautiful though unacceptable design, he wished to know whether the term "right" were to be received in the artistic or the common sense. Accordingly, knocking at the office window, he modestly requested to be informed which was the right-hand side of the letter, when he was repulsed with the counter-demand, "Do you think we have nothing to do but to answer idle questions?" the window at the same time closing with a bang.

In the same year there was, as may be still remembered, much public excitement in expectation of Her Majesty's first accouchement; lively interest turning upon the question whether the nation would be blessed with a prince or princess. Amongst other speculation on the subject, doubtless a good deal went on in the room where the three messengers (two waiting upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer and one upon me) passed most of their time, with little else to do than to discuss the topics of the day, of which they probably supposed every one's head to be as full as their own. For myself, as I was during the whole period engaged in the earnest effort to give my plan that full development which was essential to its success, I fear I did not give to the great question all the attention which its importance demanded; and even when the grand announcement was matter of hourly expectation, I was completely absorbed in the device of means for overcoming one or other of the numberless difficulties with which I had to contend. In the midst of this research the door was suddenly thrown open by my messenger, with a loud exclamation, "A Princess Royal, sir!" As the sounds which reached my ear did not inform my understanding, I merely looked up from my paper with the inquiry "Who?" and the announce-

ment, though repeated, still conveying but half-meaning, the only result was that I started up from my chair, in surprise and perplexity, with a direction to my messenger that he should “show the lady upstairs.”

I close the year’s history in a manner very pleasing to myself by transcribing the following extract of a letter received in the course of it from one to whose works I felt, in common with many of my contemporaries, deeply indebted; and whose name I can never mention but with gratitude and respect:—

DEAR SIR,

Captain Beaufort* told you very truly that I take a strong interest in the progress of the Penny Postage—both a public and a private interest; and I truly think that the British nation, the united empire, owes you millions of thanks for the improvements that have been made in social intercourse—in all the intercourse of human creatures for pleasure or business, affection or profit; including the profits of literature and science—foreign and domestic.

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I am, dear Sir,

Your obliged,

MARIA EDGEWORTH.

* The hydrographer to the Navy.

CHAPTER IX.

PROGRESS UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

AT the opening of 1841 I had been a year and a quarter in office; and, as has been seen, had been enabled, by dint of great efforts, backed by the increasing confidence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to bring into operation the most striking parts of my plan; those, indeed, which many, probably most, people at the time regarded as the whole plan; though the reader must be aware that very much was still lacking to its completion, to say nothing of those further improvements of which I was necessarily getting sight as I advanced in my work. If it had ever been supposed by Government that the whole plan could be established within the two years for which alone I had been engaged, either unfounded expectations must have been held as to Post Office co-operation, or I must have been accredited with such energy—moral and physical—such powers of convincing, persuading, or over-riding, as have been vouchsafed to few indeed. I had worked, and was still working, to the utmost extent of my power; but not only was every onward step retarded by the adverse feeling and cumbrous routine already referred to, but, as has been seen, the very maintenance of Stamp Office and Post Office action in such efficiency as to prevent clog or dis-

aster, had demanded of me almost incessant watchfulness and exertion. In short, it might by this time have been perceived that to give full effect even to my published plan would require at least several years of unremitting labour; while the field of postal improvement, taken as a whole, was (as, indeed, it still is) absolutely boundless. However, I felt at this time no further anxiety about the durability of my engagement than such as related to the stability of the existing administration. Not only had Mr. Baring expressed in words his increasing confidence, but yet greater assurance came to me from his increasing readiness to adopt my suggestions (whenever I could get opportunity to explain them), and from his leaving the routine work, so great in amount, more and more to my decision. Nay, should there arrive the calamitous event just alluded to, the exchange of the Liberal for a Tory Administration, I could not avoid indulging in the hope, that even the latter, accepting the new order of things as they had done on a far greater question six years before,* might, if only in a spirit of emulation, carry on the good work; retaining my services as a necessary means to the end. Should the reader be inclined to think that I was dwelling too much on my own interests, let him review all the main circumstances, and I think he will judge me more charitably. Let him remember how important complete efficiency in the plan was, alike to public convenience and fiscal ends; let him remember that in the Post Office itself the plan was already declared a failure; that its very permanence was yet problematical: let him consider all the reasons there were to believe that the great ends in question could be attained only by the constant efforts of one who combined, with the knowledge drawn from long and laborious investigation, a per-

* The first Reform Act.

sonal interest so deep that failure in this would seem to be failure in all, and he will not find it very hard to understand how, apart from private considerations (to which, nevertheless, I could not be insensible), I looked upon the retention of my post as a point of almost vital importance.

However, though these thoughts could not but pass through my mind, their only immediate effect was to confirm my previous determination (if that could be strengthened) to make myself so useful that my services should be regarded as indispensable. I had yet to learn that men in power do not always prefer public good to party advantage.

Meantime, was it possible that I misapprehended the state of feeling at the Post Office in respect of my plan and myself? The Chancellor of the Exchequer, friendly as he had shown himself to both, held a more favourable opinion, and might he not be in the right? Events were in progress towards the complete resolution of this question; but, meantime, the difference of opinion between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and me was necessarily an obstacle to progress, since it led me to urge what he was often at first, and sometimes at last, inclined to resist.

I must admit, however, that the first passage in my journal for the year 1841 which bears at all on the question of Post Office management is far from being of an adverse character; it is as follows:—

‘January 16th.—Yesterday I wrote by post to Colonel Maberly to ask for certain information which was supposed to exist, but which could not be found in the Treasury, owing to their having no index to their minutes, and I was only able to indicate very vaguely what I wanted. To-day I received copies of a letter from the Postmaster-General to the Treasury and the reply, both [written] in 1837, containing the information I desired. I mention this to show that the Post Office still deserves the high reputation it has long enjoyed for

promptitude in replying to letters (no unimportant convenience to those who, like myself, have frequent occasion to address it) and because, as I have frequently to find fault, I am the more anxious to praise when I can do it conscientiously.'

It may be not unprofitable to mention an arrangement at the Post Office, explaining, in a measure, its habitual promptitude in reply. The papers constantly accumulating in the Secretary's office, I should think at the rate of a small cart-load per week, are in the keeping, not of clerks, but of a corps of messengers, chosen from the general body for their superior intelligence. These, under one of their own number, manage the whole business of tying up, docketing, indexing, and arranging; and are always ready on occasion for the duty of research. The whole is admirably managed; and, paradoxical as this may be, is believed to be better done than it would be by men of higher station. Many years after the events now in narration, it was hastily thought, in a general revision of duties, that the head officer of the corps should be taken from a higher grade; but the change was found far from beneficial, and was soon reversed. The explanation seems to be that the higher officer, thinking himself rather lowered by his new employment, the more so as handling dusty papers must, in some degree, have marred the results of his toilet, discharged the duty in but a perfunctory manner; while those of the lower grade, justly regarding themselves as raised in trust and position, executed it as men perform a task in which they take pride.

It has been seen how much care was taken to prevent unlawful practices relative to the stamp; and the experience of many years attests the efficacy of the means adopted. Of course, too, when discovery, or seeming discovery, was made of a flaw in our

security, the fact was carefully withheld from the public during the period of experiment and rectification. What, then, was my surprise and vexation at an occurrence thus recorded in my journal?—

‘February 18th.—In the *Post* and *Herald* of this morning is a notice of a lecture at the Polytechnic Institution, from which it would appear that the lecturer exhibited electrotype imitations of the medallion stamp, stating, at the same time, that they could be imitated with the greatest ease, that they had consequently been abandoned, and that he was authorised by Government to make a series of experiments connected therewith. I immediately showed the paragraph to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with a view of ascertaining if he had given any such authority. He had not.’

On Mr. Cole’s applying at the Polytechnic Institution, the authorities there produced an official letter from Colonel Maberly, authorising the experiments in question, and stating that he would bear them harmless. It must be added that the experiments thus injuriously made were but a repetition of processes performed some months before, under proper authority, by Mr. Palmer, of Newgate Street; and, further, that as the stamp had now been officially registered, no attempt at imitation could be lawfully made save by authority of the Commissioners of Stamps; who, again, would have to give power by a formal warrant.

The Post Office condemnation of the plan, founded on the slow progress in the number of letters, still continuing, it was a little remarkable that there came from the same quarter written warnings to the Treasury of an expected “break-down” from excessive increase :—

‘Journal, February 11th.—[The Chancellor of the Exchequer showed me] a note from Colonel Maberly which concludes thus: “If this weather lasts I fear we shall have a break-down. We are dreadfully afflicted in London—at Derby they mus

have more assistance—at Bristol our clerks won't stay, their pay is too bad, and those who do remain will be worked to death. We will do as well as we can; but, take my word for it, we were never so near a break-down." Expressions of this kind have been rather frequent of late, and it behoves me, I think, not altogether to disregard them. They appear to me to be intended to be understood thus—there will be a break-down, but the fault is not ours; the blame rests with the new system and those who forced it upon us. My reply is, if Colonel Maberly cannot carry on the new system he ought to resign; if he remain in his present position, and there is a break-down, the fault is clearly his; at all events, the blame must and ought to fall to his share.

'February 23rd.—[Lord Lichfield, in a note to Mr. Baring] talks in the same manner as Colonel Maberly, but even more strongly of the danger of a break-down.

* * * * *

'I found Mr. Baring had acted with his usual decision. He had written to desire that Lord Lichfield would state explicitly the dangers he apprehended, and the additional strength required; after which we shall look into the cases, and then he will see Lord Lichfield and Colonel Maberly on the subject.'

It will have been observed that the apprehensions set forth above are coupled with allegations of necessity for increased force; and such demands, if granted as fast as they were made, would have defeated all hope of that large economy which, in my calculations, was counted upon from simplification of operations. Of the lavish course taken I proceed to give some further indication:—

'Journal, January 29th.—Had some conversation with the Chancellor of the Exchequer as to future proceedings. He is becoming uneasy, like myself, at the extravagant and heedless demands (apparently) of the Post Office for increased force.

'March 27th.—The Postmaster-General having made a second application for two additional clerks in the Accountant-General's Office, and two more in the Accountant for Ireland's Office, and intimated that a farther addition will probably be

required in Edinburgh, all on account of the quarterly returns ordered some time back, I wrote to Court [the London Accountant-General] to request he would call upon me on the subject, to bring copies of the forms they have sent out, &c., in order that I may judge what additional strength is really necessary.'

Mr. Court, calling as requested, though not till eleven days afterwards, I found that the demand for increased force was made in exclusive reference to these quarterly returns, which were entirely needless, as monthly returns, answering every purpose, were already received on the same subject. Mr. Court acknowledged this, but added that they had been ordered by Colonel Maberly.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, to whom I applied on the subject, informed me next day that Colonel Maberly and Mr. Court would adopt any plan for making these returns that I might suggest in writing. I had only to advise that they should not be made at all.

'*May 12th.*—The Postmaster-General having applied for what I considered a very extravagant establishment for the money-order office in Dublin, I drew a minute calling for information as to the whole amount of [money-order] poundage collected in Ireland, &c.; when it appeared, as I expected, that such amount fell short of the minimum cost of the proposed establishment in Dublin alone. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, on my recommendation, has cut down the salaries considerably.

'*May 25th.*—Managed to get about a quarter of an hour with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in which eight or ten cases were decided; in several instances the Postmaster-General's application for increased expenses in different offices being disallowed.'

The vigilance I had now so long exercised in relation to Post Office accounts was by no means allowed to abate. The following curious instance shows that even when Post Office and Stamp Office worked

together the resulting accounts might remain open to question :—

‘Journal, April 1st.—In going over the proof sheets of that part of the annual finance accounts which relates to the Post Office, I was led to suspect from their appearance that the proceeds of postage stamps sold by the Stamp Office in Ireland had been carried to the credit of the British, instead of the Irish, Post Office. Went to the Stamp Office to inquire. Pressly was confident that so gross a mistake could not have been made, but on inquiry it appeared that my suspicions were well-founded. The consequence of the mistake is that the British revenue appears to be about 15,000*l.* more, and the Irish revenue 15,000*l.* less, than it really was. Mr. Charles Crafer, who arranges the financial accounts in the Treasury, thinks the account cannot now be altered, but he will append an explanatory note. It is strange that the Irish [Post] Office should have been satisfied with such a subtraction from their revenue, the more so, because it makes up the greater part of the apparent deficit; the expenses in Ireland having exceeded the revenue, according to the account, by about 21,000*l.*, though really by 6,000*l.* only. The Stamp Office will make arrangements for preventing such a mistake in future.’

In connection with the subject of stamps, it should be mentioned that in the course of this year, Mr. Pressly, secretary to the Stamp Office, having observed that some of the provincial postmasters were also sub-distributors of stamps for general purposes, suggested the expediency of making such union the general arrangement. This suggestion I reported to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who confirmed my view in its favour, and was inclined to act upon it, at least so far as related to a number of new Post Offices about to be established in connection with the contemplated extension of rural distribution. At Mr. Pressly’s request, I wrote a minute on the subject, which was adopted by the Treasury; but the suggestion, owing probably to the change of Government

which took place shortly afterwards, was not carried into effect. After long lying dormant it was revived in the year 1863 in a Parliamentary Committee presided over by Mr. Horsfall, before which, on the 13th of March, I gave evidence in favour of the measure, but the Committee reported against it; and though some further investigations were made both in the Post Office and in the Department of Inland Revenue, no positive result followed. My opinion, however, still is that the vast organisation of the Post Office might be advantageously employed at least for the distribution of all such stamps as are in frequent demand.

In the following transaction, the Post Office alone was responsible:—

‘Journal, May 19th.—Wrote two or three scolding minutes. There have been several instances lately of great inaccuracy on the part of one or two of the surveyors, who, in applying for authority to increase the expenses at certain provincial offices, have been guilty of, to say the least, very careless misrepresentations. In the instance of the Cheltenham Office, the surveyor deducted 100*l.* from the gross annual income of the postmaster for house rent, whereas it afterwards appeared that the office is supplied rent free by the inhabitants. This and many other inaccuracies almost equally glaring have come before the Treasury unnoticed by the Post Office.’

The above circumstances might scarcely be worth mentioning, did they not tend to show how much my time was occupied in doing other people’s work, to the great hindrance of my own. A few more instances of this, and I have done:—

‘August 24th.—The Postmaster-General reports to the Treasury that he cannot proceed with the arrangements for rural distribution unless he has a map divided into registrars’ districts, or a description of the boundaries of the districts. Why he should apply to the Treasury to overcome the difficulty I know not (I wrote to Colonel Maberly some time ago

in reply to a remark of his, telling him that there was no such map in existence). However, as I would rather do the work myself than have the measure delayed, I have been to the Registration Office, Poor Law Commission, and Tithe Commission, to see if the necessary information for constructing a map can be obtained. I have also sent for Arrowsmith to meet me to-morrow morning, and hope by a little management to get the thing done.

It was done accordingly.

With distractions so numerous and so various, with a large amount of routine work, all requiring to be dealt with carefully, with opposition at the Post Office to almost every additional improvement that I proposed, and with the greatest difficulty of obtaining access to the ever-occupied Chancellor of the Exchequer, without whose sanction no step, great or small, could be taken, I found progress towards the completion of my plan but slow; a slowness the more galling because, meantime, not only general convenience, but the fiscal results of the measure were grievously suffering; while I feared that the public, knowing that I was now in office, and yet ignorant of the trammels under which I laboured, would—as in fact a large portion of it did—charge upon the plan itself failure really due to the incompleteness of its development.

It must not be supposed, however, that I was stinted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in such aid as money could procure; for as early as February of this year, having notified to him that I should require some additional assistance, I was authorised to engage whatever I might think necessary. Of course, the irremovable pressure was from that kind of work which I could not delegate to others; and this more than once seemed likely to bear me down:—

‘Journal, March 6th.—I have been unwell this week, and have done little more than carry on the current business.

Lawrence, whom I consulted to-day, has ordered leeches to be applied to my neck, and desires I will get holiday if possible.

‘*March 10th.*—Received from the Chancellor of the Exchequer a very kind note, stating that Lawrence had written to him on my case.

* * * * *

‘He also sent for me and repeated his advice in the kindest and most friendly manner, adding that he would undertake any cases which could not wait my return. In the course of conversation I expressed my regret, half in earnest half in joke, that I should have added so much to his own labour by cutting down the Post Office revenue so mercilessly. He replied that additional taxes would have been necessary even if the postage had not been reduced, and that the reduction made the imposition of such taxes much more easy. He added that he thought the measure was working exceedingly well, and begged that I would not be uneasy about it. I am to take a fortnight’s holiday immediately, and more at Easter if necessary.’

Availing myself of this kind permission, I withdrew to Brighton the next day, deriving great benefit from my rest, though, of course, I found on my return that Mr. Baring had been unable to add my load to his own too heavy burden; so that all the papers accumulated in my absence had now to be dealt with. With the holiday at Easter I was fortunately able to dispense.

Theft from money-letters increasing, of course, with increase in their number, and the Post Office authorities—though the ratio of loss was in fact considerably below that of increased remittances—affecting to regard this sequel of the late change, really so satisfactory, as a thing of sudden and portentous birth, I proposed, as a remedy, the lowering of the registration fee; which, as already mentioned, had been placed, at the demand of the Post Office, as high as a shilling; enough to act in most cases as a prohibitory duty; but the Post Office opposed my proposal on the

ground that the number of registered letters would be unmanageable in the forward offices; whereas it appeared by a recent return that at Birmingham, the largest forward office in the kingdom, only nine such letters passed through it per day; less than one per mail.

This bugbear of “the forward offices” will reappear in this narrative, having, indeed, served the Post Office authorities much as that of the “Hong Merchants” had served the East India Company some ten years before.

The Liberal Administration, which had been for some time losing ground, showed, as the parliamentary session advanced, increasing signs of weakness; the falling revenue being, of course, one of its chief difficulties; and I could not but feel that for this I should probably be regarded as in some degree answerable; since the public could know little of the obstructions to the fiscal success of my plan, and would, I feared, form its conclusion by simply placing together the two facts, that the postage had been lowered to a penny and the postal revenue fallen from 1,600,000*l.* to 500,000*l.* More than ever did I regret that my proposals had not been so taken up by the Government as to admit of that gradual introduction of my plan which would have prevented this loss. It must be remembered, however, as was handsomely acknowledged by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that the postal loss was by no means the only one which the revenue had sustained; the country being at that time under one of those depressions which lessened the produce of all taxes of whatever kind. In reviewing the whole matter calmly, as I can do now, I feel also called upon to remember that if, through excess of caution, the establishment of penny postage had been delayed until such general depres-

sion, combined, as it was, with other causes, had thrown out the Liberal Government, the reform would, in all probability, have been deferred, at least, until the return of the Liberals to power six years later.

Be all this as it may, I felt anxious upon three points: first, would the Tories, if they came into office, attempt a reactionary course? Second, supposing that they left the penny rate unchanged, would they stop the progress of the other improvements essential to the completion of my plan? And, third, would they retain my services? I naturally clung to the wish that I might be allowed to complete what I sincerely believed to be a great improvement; the more so as, with all the fond imagination of an inventor, I already seemed dimly to foresee its universal adoption producing universal benefit.

I resolved, at all events, to push forward improvement as fast as I could, in order that the Government which had given me my post might have whatever credit such improvements might bring.

One of these, for which the warrant was issued on March 23rd, reduced the British postage between the United Kingdom on the one hand, and Hamburg and Lubeck on the other, from 1s. 6d. and 1s. 8d. respectively, to a uniform rate of 6d.; and the same reduction was extended, five months later, to Bremen; the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as he signed the latter warrant, expressing peculiar satisfaction at the advantage thus given to the city whence, as he informed me, his family originally came. Warrants signed on the same day as this latter document reduced the rates to the Western coast of South America and established rates to the lately-formed colony of New Zealand. It was with some difficulty, amidst the bustle of the time, that I got this latter

warrant signed. Three days later the signature, if given, as is probable, would have made it the act of another Government.

A yet more desirable measure was the extension of rural distribution at home. Having ascertained by a circular of inquiry that there were 400 registrars' districts without a Post Office, I obtained sanction for the establishment of a Post Office in each of them, Lord Lichfield promising to push on the arrangements immediately. By very great exertion progress to this point was effected in little more than a month; but how very long the measure, thus apparently secured, had to wait for effect will appear hereafter.

Concurrently with this proceeding I was fortunate enough to effect an arrangement for keeping open the Lombard Street and branch offices to a later hour. Much opposition was made to this change, and a counter measure was proposed which would have involved a needless increase of force: all this, however, was eventually overruled, but the trouble and delay attending the measure were a strong instance of the difficulty experienced in working out details.

Amongst the anomalies I found in the Post Office, a striking one, as already implied, lay in the emoluments of the various provincial postmasters, which, having been settled on no rule, exhibited abundant irregularities. For this I sought a remedy.

To lay down a satisfactory rule, however, required such information as was for the time unattainable, through the almost total want of systematic statistics in the Post Office. The evil of such deficiency had lately been curiously exemplified. In the year 1837, the postmasters throughout the kingdom, being called on to report the amount of their respective late letter fees, which they then retained as a per-

quisite, had for the most part rated it low, probably thinking it to their interest that their emoluments should appear small; but in the year 1840, when it was proposed to commute such perquisite for a fixed allowance, the reports then made showed, for the most part, an enormous augmentation; and though doubtless many of these returns were made fairly enough, yet the increase, even on the average, was surprising large. Now it was obvious that if the returns had been made as a matter of course from year to year, when no change was in prospect, such sudden exaggeration would have been impracticable. I consequently proposed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that there should henceforth be a yearly return of all emoluments; and that, as the Post Office appeared unwilling to undertake the necessary collection and classification, the duty should be added to my department. To this recommendation, which was made as early as February, I received, at the time, no decided answer; Mr. Baring, though thinking the measure desirable, not rating the statistics so highly as I did. I again brought the measure before him, with several others, in the month of July, anxious that all should be adopted before the change then evidently approaching should take place; and again obtained a general approbation of all I proposed, without, however, any authority to proceed further.

Increase in the number of letters had, meanwhile, proceeded satisfactorily:—

‘Journal, February 2nd.—The Chancellor of the Exchequer is much pleased with the increase of letters, as shown by the comparison of the present period with the corresponding weeks of 1840, and wishes a form of return, exhibiting the results, to be prepared for Parliament. Last night the number of letters and newspapers was such, that with every exertion the mails could not be despatched in time.’

I need not say that, throughout the whole period

which I am describing, I was anxiously alive to whatever might indicate the probable course of events :—

February 9th.—Herries has been moving for certain returns of Post Office revenue, &c., and the Chancellor of the Exchequer tells me that he thinks the Tories, especially if they get into power, will try to advance the rate to twopence. I told him that I did not think they could succeed, at the same time reminding him that I always was of opinion that twopence would produce the larger revenue.'

Mr. Baring held the opposite opinion, and I now believe that he was right. A few months afterwards, financial difficulties increasing, I was called on to estimate the probable effect of raising the rate to twopence, and my report, made, of course, after careful inquiry and consideration, was not such as to induce Ministers to try the change.

To avoid recurring to the subject, I may here add that once only was the question revived. This was during the financial pressure consequent on the Russian war; when being called on to make a confidential report, I showed that, though some immediate increase of revenue might be expected from raising the rate to twopence, the benefit would probably be more than counterbalanced, in the long run, by the check to correspondence; and upon this, the project was finally abandoned.

As has been seen, however, the course of the Tories was still uncertain :—

April 30th.—The Chancellor of the Exchequer brought on his Budget to-night. I was under the gallery. The Tories were aghast at the Free Trade proposals, which occupied so much of their attention, that they had little to say on the subject of postage. Perhaps the returns, showing the steady increase of letters, may have something to do with the matter. Sir Robert Peel was quite silent on the subject; Goulburn talked some nonsense and made some false [erroneous would have been a juster term] statements

with as much confidence as though he had understood what he was talking about. He was answered by Hume.

May 12th.—The Chancellor of the Exchequer expressed an apprehension that Sir Robert Peel would attempt to advance the postage rate to twopence.

May 13th.—Mr. Wallace called to say that he has no doubt Ministers must resign, and that the Tories will attempt to advance the postage—he says to threepence. Last night Mr. Patrick Chalmers told me fourpence.

July 6th.—He [the Chancellor of the Exchequer] still thinks it probable that Peel will advance the rate.'

Anxiety on this point, however, was eventually relieved:—

August 27th.—The Chancellor of the Exchequer tells me that from what he observed in the course of his speech last night in the House of Commons, when he spoke of the reduction in postage, he is satisfied that Peel does not intend to raise the rate. * * * Cole reports that Mr. Moffatt has seen Lord Lowther, who tells him that there is no danger of the Tories raising the postage rate.'

From what has been said, it may be inferred that indications of the approaching change multiplied as time went on; and it is unnecessary for me to add that the dissolution to which the Government resorted, when defeated in its Free Trade policy, resulted in the election of a House by which it was unseated.

As the catastrophe approached my personal anxiety naturally increased; a feeling readily understood and kindly recognised by the Chancellor of the Exchequer:—

May 12th.— * * * This led to a conversation as to my own position, in course of which Mr. Baring expressed himself very strongly as to my zeal and skilful management, and said, that if the period for renewing my engagement were come, he should certainly propose to continue it, but that he could not, with justice to those who might succeed the present Government, renew it now. He will, however, record his opinion either in a minute or letter to myself

as to the manner in which I have discharged my duty. Nothing could be more kind and friendly than his whole conduct, and I feel much indebted for the open manner in which he spoke on so delicate a subject as the present position of Government.

‘*June 22nd.*—Applied for an interview with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but could see him only for a moment, in the presence of others. He was just starting for Portsmouth (for which he sits), and will be absent a week.’

As matters were pressing, I wrote to him a letter in which, after repeating the various reasons previously urged for placing the administration of my plan permanently in my own hands, I suggested for consideration the expediency of taking advantage of official changes then in progress to transfer Colonel Maberly to some other post. The letter will be found in the Appendix (E.).

‘*July 6th.*—Had a long audience with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and nearly emptied my box of papers. This done, he entered on the subject of my letter, and in the course of a very friendly conversation spoke to the following effect. He was afraid that there was no place vacant which could be offered to Colonel Maberly. I mentioned the vacancy in the Poor Law Commission. He first said that he thought Colonel Maberly would not like the appointment, but, on my pressing that he should be asked, Mr. Baring intimated that it had been filled up; he admitted that it was now desirable that I should be in the Post Office, and added nearly as follows: “If there had been a vacancy in the secretaryship of the Post Office when I first knew you I certainly should not have given you the appointment, because experience has convinced me that inventors are seldom men of business; but, having worked with you for nearly two years, I have no hesitation in saying that if there were now a vacancy I should propose to Lord Melbourne to give you the appointment.” I suggested that, as the surveyors are the agents by whom improvements are carried into effect, perhaps the object in view might be accomplished by making me Surveyor-General. He promised to think of this, and, referring to our conversation of May 12th, said, that as my engagement would terminate in

about two months, he should not hesitate in renewing it in some shape or other.

August 20th.—Spoke again to Mr. Baring on the subject of my engagement. He stated that his intention was to renew it for a year certain, and, on my proposing an indefinite renewal, said that if that were done the question of salary must be reconsidered (in which I acquiesced), and that he doubted whether he should be justified in such a renewal. Finally, he promised to reconsider the matter, and to show me the minute before anything was decided. I don't think this is quite just towards myself. My measure has been adopted by Government; it has been tried under great disadvantages, owing to the continuance at the Post Office of those who are hostile to it, and still it has succeeded, and I have given entire satisfaction to Mr. Baring, as he has repeatedly assured me; I think therefore that a permanent position, either in the Post Office or the Treasury, should be given to me. It is absurd to expect that the work will ever be completed. Practically, there is no end to the improvements which it is desirable to make, and I ought not to be exposed to the anxiety resulting from the insecurity as regards my own income, in addition to that which is inseparable from my position. I would rather suffer some diminution of income and have the matter made permanent, though, considering the labour, responsibility and difficulty of my duties, I don't think I am overpaid.

August 27th.—Was interrupted after a very short interview [with the Chancellor of the Exchequer], and before I got through a tithe of my business. Had no opportunity of speaking to him, as I intended, on my own engagement.

August 28th.—Waited in vain till late in the evening for an interview with Mr. Baring. He has, however, promised to see me on Monday. Division in the House of Commons last night on the address (a majority of ninety-one against Ministers) makes an immediate resignation necessary, and I am, of course, anxious not only to settle my own engagement but several Post Office references which have been long in hand.

August 30th.—Had a further conversation with the Chancellor of the Exchequer as to my engagement. He now intends to write me a letter on the subject, as he did when I was first engaged; but I fear it will not be so decisive a renewal as I think it ought to be. He appears to shrink

from the responsibility of any decisive act now, which, though very considerate towards his successors, is not, I think, quite fair towards me. He is, however, quite friendly, and promises to do all in his power. In the course of conversation he said that I must expect hereafter a change in the tone of the Post Office authorities; that from the very highest to the lowest they were hostile to me and my plan, and that now he could no longer support me such a change was probable. I think he expressed himself somewhat more strongly than facts justify, but, in the main, I fear he is correct, and if so, it is clear that the plan has been tried under most unfavourable circumstances.

‘*September 1st.*—I again spoke to Mr. Baring about my engagement. He has not yet written the letter, but promises to do it forthwith; the delay causes me much anxiety, and will, I fear, prevent the possibility of obtaining any modification in the letter, however desirable. Mr. Goulburn is to be the Chancellor of the Exchequer, not Sir Robert Peel, as was expected. Mr. Baring thinks this an advantageous arrangement for myself, as I shall have a better chance of access to him. Report makes Lord Lowther Postmaster-General, an arrangement which would be very favourable to my plan.’

I scarcely need say that the pleasing delusion into which I thus fell was effectually dispelled in the course of the following year:—

‘*September 2nd.*—On arriving at the office I found the following letter on my table:

September 1, 1841.

DEAR SIR,

As it may be satisfactory to you to have in writing the position in which I consider you to stand, I propose to put on paper my view, in order that you may use it for the information of my successor.

I wish, therefore, to state that some time ago I informed you, in reference to the Post Office business, that I thought it would be of great advantage to continue your services beyond the two years originally settled; that I did not deem it expedient to make any engagement beyond one year, but that you might consider that for one year from the expira-

tion of the former two years your services were engaged, on the same conditions as before.

I think it but justice to you not to conclude this letter without expressing to you my thanks for the unwearied and zealous assistance which you have given me in the carrying on the Post Office business. I feel satisfied that without that assistance it would have been scarcely possible for the Treasury to have given any proper consideration to the arrangements for putting the scheme into effect, and I am happy in having to record my entire satisfaction with the manner in which you have conducted the business of your office.

You will make what use you please of this letter by showing it to my successor.

Yours very sincerely,

F. T. BARING.

This is not what I could wish as regards the length of the engagement, but I am satisfied that it is all Mr. Baring considers himself justified in doing; and feeling that it would be very ungracious to object to so kind a letter, I acknowledged it as follows :—

Downing Street, Sept. 2, 1841.

DEAR SIR,

Pray accept my earnest thanks for your very kind and gratifying letter, and for the just and able manner in which you have carried my plan, so far, into effect.

Looking forward with much anxiety, but in the hope that happier times for all of us may yet be in store,

I have, &c.,

ROWLAND HILL.

This must have been one of Mr. Baring's latest official acts, as the formal resignation of Ministers took place on the following day; and though I had subsequently, and, indeed, to the end of his life, much gratifying intercourse with him, our official relations here terminated. Of the important aid which he afterwards gave me much remains to

be said; but I will here so far anticipate as to mention an incident which occurred twenty-two years after this time.

Soon after my final retirement from the Post Office, happening to be at Brighton, I met Sir Francis Baring—for he had then succeeded to the Baronetcy—and presently received a call from him. In conversation with my wife, he remarked that oftentimes, when he worked with me at the Treasury, he had disagreed with me in opinion, but had always found afterwards that he was in the wrong and I was in the right. Upon Lady Hill's observing that she had been taught by her husband to believe all Sir Francis Baring's decisions right, he replied, with a laugh: "Well, then, now you have the very best authority for believing them wrong."

Three days after the date of Mr. Baring's letter he left Downing Street for the continent. About 11 o'clock the same day Mr. Goulburn entered on the business of his office.

Twenty-seven years before this time, when Bonaparte abdicated the throne of France and withdrew to Elba, a caricature was said to be privately circulated in Paris, representing an eagle flying out from a window in the Tuileries, while a fat goose waddled in at the door. Perhaps the reader who has followed me through my labours and anxieties, who has sympathised in my disappointments and rejoiced in my success, and who remembers, in addition, that I had been all my life a Liberal, and was by no means free from the prejudices of my party, will pardon me when I confess that my mind, at this crisis, harboured a feeling too much resembling the scorn and bitterness which prompted the French caricature.

Yet had I, amidst all my troubles, some aids to complacency. Of the approbation of the Chancellor of the Exchequer I have already spoken, and cer-

tainly this was my greatest comfort. The following tokens, however, had their value.

On the 8th of April, I received a very beautiful silver salver from Liverpool, accompanied with a letter from Mr. Egerton Smith, Editor of the *Liverpool Mercury*, the leading journal of that town, a gentleman who had from the first been an earnest supporter of Penny Postage, and who remained its steady advocate to the end of his life. The letter informed me that the salver had been purchased with the pence contributed by thousands of his fellow-townsmen, and that Mr. Mayer, in whose works the plate had been produced, and by whom it was delivered into my hands, had waived all considerations of profit and worked *con amore*. The inscription on the salver is at once gratifying and simple.

On July 2nd I received from Glasgow two highly-wrought silver wine-coolers, accompanied with a kind letter from Mr. Francis Reid, and bearing an inscription stating that it was “in testimony of gratitude,” from a few gentlemen of that city.

To the foregoing attestations I cannot forbear to add the following extract of a letter from my valued friend the late Captain Basil Hall, R.N. :—

H.M.S. *Indus*. Off Lisbon,
August 17, 1841.

MY DEAR SIR,

* * *

I made a great effort, when I was in London, just before sailing, to call on you.

* * *

I wished to have asked you not to intermit your intensely interesting communications about the working of your most noble measure, and which you may be sure will only be the more valuable by reason of the distance I am from any chance of personal communication. I do not ask you to write—as I know how much your time is taken up by letters

of immediate importance—but I pray you to send me any printed statements you may make, or any MS. statements which a clerk might copy.

* * * *

May I ask for two or three copies of the Report you read to the Statistical Society ; as I have, stupidly enough, given away all those you sent me. I ought to have kept one, at least, to astonish the natives at Malta. Greatly, I assure you, it did astonish and, I need not say, delight me ; and I ought long ago to have wished you joy of the glorious promise it holds out. * * * It must indeed be a proud consideration to you to think that your single instrumentality has augmented the number of letters from a million and a half in four weeks (in 1839) to five millions in the beginning of 1841. It makes me giddy when I think of it all ; and when I try to fancy the immense increase of intercommunication which these figures imply, I am lost in admiration of the boldness of your conception, and in the skill and perseverance with which you have followed it up in practice. I do not know what others feel, but I am conscious of the deepest gratitude to you, and only wish I could evince it in something more satisfactory than words.

Ever most sincerely yours,

BASIL HALL.

Of course the unsatisfactory feelings produced by the recent change were withheld from expression ; indeed I was most anxious that nothing on my part should add to the official prejudice already known to exist against me.

CHAPTER X.

NEW MASTERS. (1841-2.)

ON the day when Mr. Goulburn entered on the duties of his office I wrote a note to him, enclosing Mr. Baring's letter, and requesting an interview at his convenience. Meanwhile circumstances occurred to raise my hopes :—

'September 6th.—Called on Mr. Stephen [the late Sir James Stephen] at the Colonial Office on some postage business. He assures me that I shall find Mr. Goulburn very pleasant to transact business with—a man of high honour and of great skill in *details*. Mr. [now Sir John] Lefevre, whom I afterwards saw at the Board of Trade, gave a similar account of him.'

The first part of this favourable opinion was, in a measure, confirmed the same day :—

'This afternoon I had my first interview with Mr. Goulburn: he received me with great civility, and inquired as to the nature of my engagement, duties, &c. He appeared somewhat at a loss to know what I could have to do, and was not a little surprised when I told him that seventy-two cases had been referred to me in the month of August alone. He seemed to think that my plan was fully introduced, and did not, as it appeared to me, learn with much satisfaction that much remained to be done. We went through three or four papers that were pressing, and he readily acquiesced in all my recommendations. He is to consider whether the

business hereafter shall be conducted with himself or with one of the secretaries. I inquired if he saw any objection to my communicating with Lord Lowther; he replied, that he thought the more I conferred with Lord Lowther the better.'

The next day's record was also satisfactory :—

'*September 7th.*—Had my first interview with Sir George Clerk, the new Secretary, and was received with great politeness.'

Presently, however, came passages of a somewhat different character :—

'*September 13th.*—Called on Lord Lowther. Stated my own desire, and that of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that I should communicate freely with him on postage matters. He did not appear to me to meet the advance cordially, but it is said that he is habitually cold, reserved, and cautious. He told me that his patent not being made out, he was not yet authorised to act, and appeared to desire that I should understand that to be a reason for restricted communication at present. I found that he had read my paper "on the results of the plan," &c., and the attack upon it, but he expressed no opinion on either. Altogether, I do not consider the interview very satisfactory.'

In a few days practical results of the change began to appear. An application which I made to the Post Office for needful information was declined, on the alleged authority of the new Postmaster-General, unless made according to forms which would have made the actual slow progress intolerably slower; and, at the same time, papers arriving at the Treasury from the Post Office, which hitherto had been all handed over to me, were now almost entirely withheld. On the former point, however, matters were set right for the time by a second interview with Lord Lowther, who, I found, had acted in the belief that he was merely continuing the previous practice, and who appeared annoyed at having been

misled. By his authority I wrote a letter to Colonel Maberly, referring alike to his lordship's intentions, and to the Treasury Minute in which my right for immediate information was distinctly laid down. My letter, which I wished to soften as much as possible, contained the following passage :—

‘Let me add, that though clearly entitled to act as I have done, I would at once have given up my claim and adopted the suggestion contained in your note, if I were not convinced that to resort to the formality of Treasury Minutes in the numerous instances in which inquiry is necessary would seriously retard the progress of business.’

The former order being thus re-established at the Post Office, there remained to seek a similar restoration at the Treasury. Here, however, Mr. (now Sir Charles) Trevelyan (Assistant Secretary to the Treasury) had kindly intervened on my behalf, strongly recommending that the opportunity of checking the Post Office expenditure should not be taken from me, and had procured from Sir George Clerk a promise to consult with Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Goulburn on the subject ; but as no further result was obtained, I wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, suggesting that, in my present lack of employment, I should either proceed with measures for the further introduction of my plans, or that if this were at the time impracticable, I should be allowed an interval of entire repose after the heavy labours of the last two years.

This letter produced an immediate effect, Mr. Trevelyan, Sir George Clerk, and even the Chancellor of the Exchequer all speaking to me on the subject in the course of the same day ; explanations were given, arrangements made (a kind of compromise which I hoped would, in operation, gradually put all things right), and the desired holiday most readily granted.

“Everything,” says my journal, “was said in the most polite, and, to all appearance, friendly manner, and altogether things have assumed a much more favourable aspect.”

Accordingly, five days later, I left home for the lake district: certainly my term of holiday was very little interrupted with business, nor did I find more than three or four papers awaiting me on my return a month afterwards.

One intervening incident, however, I must not omit to mention. The original conception of a uniform penny rate has been more than once, of late years, attributed to Mr. Wallace. How far that generous-hearted man was from making such a claim himself may be gathered from the following passage in a speech delivered by him at Aberdeen, and reported in the *Aberdeen Herald* of October 2nd:—

‘And here let me say, once for all, that to Mr. Hill alone is the country indebted for that scheme, for he is the real inventor, and its only discoverer, while the honour conferred to-day upon me can only apply to working it out in Parliament.’

I may observe that, gratifying as such attestation naturally was, I so little expected at that time any dispute as to the true authorship of the plan, that I did not even record the fact in my journal; which, indeed, presents a perfect blank from the day of my departure to that of my return.

The benefit derived from my holiday was not checked by my first interview with the Chancellor of the Exchequer:—

‘*November 5th.*—Got through much business with the Chancellor of the Exchequer very satisfactorily.’

Nevertheless, the same interview ushered in what afterwards proved a very serious matter. It was indeed the beginning of the end; since the move

then first announced eventually led, as I was informed, and as I fully believe, to my being driven from office.

Before treating of this, however, it will be convenient to deal with various other matters.

The withdrawal of routine papers from my charge having, of course, diminished my amount of work, it was notified to me that my establishment should be reduced, and suggested that Mr. Cole's services might be dispensed with. While admitting this on the supposition that affairs remained on their present footing :—

‘I expressed an opinion (November 10th) that it would be better to employ the whole strength of the establishment, and offered to go into the Post Office to organise the registration of letters and superintend the execution of the remaining parts of my plan, &c. ; all of which he [Mr. Trevelyan] undertook to report to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but intimated that his instructions were to reduce the establishment, and talked of my doing with one clerk, to which I decidedly objected.

‘*November 11th.*—Mr. Trevelyan told me that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had decided with regard to Cole (he leaves on January 10th, at the end of his quarter); that he appeared well inclined as to my going into the Post Office, and would write to the Postmaster-General on the subject.

‘*January 8th, 1842.*—Cole leaves me to-day. The progress of the Penny Postage both before and after its adoption by Government, has been greatly promoted by his zeal and activity.’

Meantime, however, it had been ordered by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that all papers relative to the Post Office, by whomsoever dealt with, should afterwards be shown to me; in order that I might be made fully aware of the course of proceeding.

Upon reading over the papers which had been disposed of without being referred to me, I had the pleasure to find that the manner in which they had been dealt with was on the whole satisfactory.

The inconvenience of previous reticence soon appeared :—

‘*December 9th, 1841.*—A communication from the Post Office, and one from the Admiralty, regarding the West India mails, having been referred to me, I stepped over to the Foreign Office to consult with Mr. Murray with reference to certain instructions to the Consuls, when I found that the Post Office was communicating with the Foreign Office as well as the Treasury, and the whole matter was getting into inextricable confusion; this has arisen in consequence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer having disposed of some of the papers without referring them to myself. I shall be able to put the matter right, and trust that it will now be left in my hands. No time is to be lost, as the first packet sails on January 1st, and the detailed arrangements for transmitting the mails from port to port and collecting and remitting the postage remain to be made.’

All this I was fortunately able to effect.

Gradually I seemed to inspire some amount of confidence :—

‘*December 11th.*—This week I have had several difficult cases not connected with penny postage, and I think I perceive, on the part of Sir George Clerk, a tendency to rely more on me than heretofore.’

Similar entries appear on December 18th and 24th; but within two months the favourable aspect changed :—

‘*February 12th, 1842.*—I have had three or four cases referred to me this week, but by far the greater number, though certainly the least difficult, are decided in the Treasury. This circumstance, coupled with the total silence on the part of the Chancellor of the Exchequer with regard to my recent letters to him, shows, I fear, that no friendly feeling is entertained towards myself, and if so, towards my plan.’

This impression was gradually confirmed by subsequent events.

While support at the Treasury was thus feeble and vacillating, I could have very small hope of aid from the Post Office. It has indeed been seen that Lord Lowther had withdrawn all objection to my calling for returns as before ; but these, though the information I was able to extract from them was of use, were in themselves a constant source of trouble from their inaccuracy :—

‘*March 8th, 1842.*—Sent [to the Post Office] the financial returns recently made to the Treasury, for correction. Ledingham cannot convince —— that they are wrong (which they clearly are in principle), and they are come back uncorrected. It is strange that men whose sole duty it is to keep accounts should not only blunder, but be unable to see the error when pointed out.’

It was in this account, I believe, but certainly in one from the same functionary, that the balance carried forward at the close of a quarter changed its amount in the transit ; and when I pointed out this fact as conclusive against the correctness of the account, it was urged that, without such modification, the next quarter’s account could not be made to balance. Happily, however, this impossibility gave way, so that at length the error was fully admitted, and, by rectification in details, the due result obtained. Errors, however, did not end here :—

‘*May 20th, 1842.*—Received the Parliamentary Returns from the Post Office. Very inaccurate. Sent Ledingham with them to the Post Office to get them corrected.’

In short, it is literally true that an accurate return or statement in detail of any kind from the Post Office was at this time a rare exception.

If I had found it hard to make head previously to the late change, I found progress now almost impracticable ; and, though I persevered in unremitting

effort, I had little indeed of that encouragement which is derived from the prospect of speedy success.

For some time, as already said, I had even considerable anxiety about retrogression; but these forebodings, at least, were not confirmed by the event:—

‘*March 7th, 1842.*—To-day’s *Morning Post* has a leader on the subject of the financial measures to be brought forward by Sir Robert Peel on Friday, from which the following is an extract: “It is conjectured by some that Mr. Rowland Hill’s Penny Postage inroad upon a revenue which could ill afford such an experiment, is to be counteracted, not by the restoration of the old system, but by an increase to the uniform rate of postage. The objections to this are that it would not do much to supply the deficiency, and that it would be an interference with an experiment deliberately adopted by a former Parliament, and not yet acknowledged by advocates to have failed in a financial point of view.”’

It is to be feared that to this very day the “advocates” remain as obstinately unconvinced as ever:—

‘*March 12th, 1842.*—Penny Postage is safe. Sir Robert Peel, in announcing his financial measures last night, states that he does not intend to advance the rate, at least at present. He speaks highly of the social advantages of Penny Postage, and expresses an opinion that the measure has not yet had a full trial. But he states, erroneously, that the cost of the packet service defrayed by the Admiralty exceeds the Post Office net revenue.’

This was, I believe, the first appearance of a statement which, in one form or other, has ever since tended to perplex or mislead the public. More of this hereafter.

Of my efforts for improvement during this year of difficulties I propose to speak in less detail than heretofore, limiting attention to a few matters of chief importance. My labours were not altogether ineffectual, though for the most part, as already intimated, effect was rare and limited. To some extent

the rule already adopted with regard to new salaries and additional emoluments must, I think, have acted to check extravagance, even when detailed control had passed from my own hands; and I may add that an occurrence about this time, due to past proceedings, showed in a striking manner the value of the rule:—

‘*June 11th, 1842.*—Week’s work chiefly a large number of salary cases, *i.e.*, applications for advances, allowances, &c. which have been waiting ever since May, 1841, for returns ordered from the Post Office. Many prove on investigation to be utterly groundless: whether this explains the delay of twelve months in making the returns (some indeed are not even yet sent in) I cannot say.’

Of course my chief aim at this time, supposing the penny rate to be secure, was to introduce measures for increased facility, on which depended, in great degree, the multiplication of letters, and for improved economy to render such increase adequately beneficial to the revenue.

It will be remembered that one of the last acts of the late Chancellor of the Exchequer was to give the Treasury sanction to a plan for extending rural distribution. The necessity for such a measure at the time is abundantly shown in the following summary, which I subsequently gave in evidence, the items of which, though literally correct, will scarcely be credited in the present day:—

‘The establishment of rural Post Offices does not appear to have been regulated by any well-defined principle. In some districts, owing apparently to the greater activity of the surveyors, they are exceedingly numerous; in others, of superior relative importance, they are comparatively infrequent. Some places, of 200 or 300 inhabitants, have them; others, with 2000 or 3000, are without.

‘Of the 2100 registrars’ districts, comprised in England and Wales, about 400, containing a million and a half of

inhabitants, have no Post Offices whatever. The average extent of these 400 districts is nearly 20 square miles each; the average population about 4000. The average population of the chief place of the district about 1400; and the average distance of such chief place from the nearest Post Office between four and five miles.

‘Again, while we have seen that those districts which are altogether without Post Offices contain, in the aggregate, a million and a half of inhabitants, it can scarcely be doubted that even those districts which are removed from this class by having a Post Office in some one or other of their towns or villages contain, in their remaining places, a much larger population destitute of such convenience. The amount of population thus seriously inconvenienced the Post Office has declared itself unable to estimate; but it is probable that in England and Wales alone it is not less than four millions. The great extent of the deficiency is shown by the fact, that while these two divisions of the empire contain about 11,000 parishes, their total number of Post Offices of all descriptions is only about 2000.

‘In some places *quasi* Post Offices have been established by carriers and others, whose charges add to the cost of a letter in some instances as much as 6*d*. A penny for every mile from the Post Office is a customary demand.’

By the plan sanctioned by Mr. Baring, an office was to be established forthwith in every registrar’s district where as yet none existed; my intention being to propose such further extension, from time to time, as experience might justify.

In my triumph at carrying this measure through the Treasury before the change of Ministers, I forgot to make due allowance for the Post Office’s power of passive resistance; and was therefore unprepared for a discovery which I accidentally made four months later, viz., that Mr. Baring’s minute on rural distribution had been suspended by Mr. Goulburn. Of the reason for this suspension, I could never, so long as I remained in office, get any information; but more will appear on the subject hereafter.

I have spoken of the great and increasing expense of railway conveyance. Convinced that there was room for economy, I had directed a portion of my attention to this department :—

‘*September 10th, 1841.*—Completed a long minute on the subject of a proposed day mail to Newcastle-on-Tyne, in the course of which I have endeavoured to establish some principles with reference to day mails, and to point out modes by which the cost of railway conveyance in this and other similar cases might be greatly reduced. Sent draft to Lieutenant Harness for his perusal.’

I cannot mention the name of Lieutenant (now Colonel) Harness, without adding that I always found in him a very zealous and efficient co-operator. I owe much to the information and assistance which he yielded me from time to time.

The plan I proposed, which was upon the whole more convenient for the public than the existing arrangement, involved a saving of about 5000*l.* a year; and it was with much satisfaction that five months later (February 10th, 1842) I learnt that it had received the approbation of the Postmaster-General.

How I was unexpectedly prevented from myself carrying this important project into effect will be shown a few pages later.

A second railway case, and certainly a remarkable one, was as follows :—

‘*January 15th, 1842.*—There are two railway mails from Birmingham to Gloucester and back, both late at night, and with an interval of only about two hours between; the cost of each is about 5000*l.* per annum, and after a careful investigation of the subject I think there is little doubt that one of the two is unnecessary; certainly the reason for it given by the Post Office on my application is unsatisfactory.’

I consequently prepared a minute embodying my views, which was adopted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but brought a demurrer from the Postmaster-General, who maintained the necessity for the double despatch in a Report which, however, I found to be full of blunders and misstatements. After obtaining further information, and further examining the whole subject, I succeeded in not only devising a plan for withdrawing one of the mails without the slightest injury to the public service, but in indicating subsidiary changes which promised to procure for the public more convenience from the one train than was then afforded by the two. This device, however, involved so much labour, and required so much caution, that my Report was not completed until I was almost on the point of leaving the Treasury. After my retirement, however, the Treasury, using this report, forced upon the Post Office the adoption of my plan.

I must here mention that, more than twenty-five years after this period, I first learnt from Mr. Edward Page, then Inspector-General of Mails, that before the receipt at the Post Office of my report on the subject, he himself had made the same discovery, and suggested a remedy, which, however, was rejected by the higher authorities of the Post Office.

Meanwhile, a curious incident occurred, which, however small in itself, showed how far the Office was competent to deal correctly with questions of economy. On the Glasgow and Ayr Railway the practice had been to place the bags under the care of the railway guard; a service for which the company received 40*l.* a year. A Report came to the Treasury from the Postmaster-General, showing that he had superseded this service by the appointment of a mail guard, and taking credit to himself for economy so effected by the discontinuance of such payment; the

self-gratulation being made in the apparent forgetfulness that the mail guard's salary would be somewhere about double the sum saved.

One form of extravagant expenditure on railway conveyance was in occupation of superfluous space:—

'August 2nd, 1842.—In one instance, to which I have called attention, namely, the day mail between York and Normanton, the maximum weight of the bags being only two quarters twenty-four pounds, two compartments of a second-class carriage are occupied by the Post Office, that is to say, sixteen passengers are displaced to make room for what is about equivalent to the luggage of one. Recommended a thorough investigation of the subject.'

In consequence of this very startling discovery, the Post Office was directed to report upon the state of all the railway lines in respect of space occupied, with a view to preparing some very stringent regulations for putting a stop to such waste of public money; the Report, however, had not been received when my services came to an end.

Another form of waste arose from inaccuracy as to the length of railway used by the Post Office on particular lines, the award, according to a common practice, fixing not a gross sum, but a mileage rate; thus, after much dunning for information, I found the Post Office so overpaying one company by as much as 400*l.* a year, though the true distance was stated both in its official notices to the Company and in its own time bills; and, what was more remarkable, after I had pointed out the error, persisting in justification of the amount. I consequently drew up a Report on the subject, which will be found in the evidence taken before the Parliamentary Committee on Postage of 1843.

Meantime, however, I had had the satisfaction to perceive that, little as my services were estimated at the Post Office, the agitation produced by my

movements had led to some efforts towards improvement, the Postmaster-General proposing, in consequence of my representations, to discontinue a railway mail from Derby to Nottingham and to substitute coach conveyance, by which a saving of about 1000*l.* a year would be effected at no loss of time in the delivery of the letters, as the whole transit was in the night.

My serious attention was also drawn to the Money-Order Department, in relation to which I drew a long minute, suggesting means for simplifying the accounts, and thus effecting a great saving in the cost of management. Sir George Clerk appeared to be much struck with the facts of the case, but, considering it too important for his decision, said he would consult the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

It so happened that the necessity for decided measures was demonstrated by the discovery of an alarming fraud at a provincial office. The postmaster had absconded with a debt to the revenue of more than 2200*l.*, of which only 1000*l.* was covered by sureties. It was fortunate that his flight had not been taken a year earlier, when his debt was much larger, varying from 3000*l.* to 5000*l.* Even as it was, but for energetic measures taken by the Post Office the loss would have been greater. I pointed out to Sir George Clerk that about 250,000*l.* appeared to be in the hands of the several postmasters, and that other losses must be expected. Sir George Clerk concurred in this view, and said the Chancellor of the Exchequer would speak to the Postmaster-General on the subject. Nevertheless my minute* was set aside, a mere temporary arrangement being substituted.

It may be convenient to remark here that the money-order accounts with the several postmasters,

* 'Appendix to the Report of the Committee on Postage (1843),' p. 56.

which were then made up and transmitted to the Central Office for audit but once a quarter, are now made up and audited every day; and that no such fraud, at least to any serious amount, has occurred since 1847, in which year I subjected the Money-Order Office to a thorough revision.

In reference to the serious case reported above, I have great pleasure in mentioning that the son of the defaulter, moved only by filial obligation, eventually made good the whole loss.

I return now to the notification made to me by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on November 5th, 1841,* a notification already spoken of as fraught with serious consequences.

He informed me that the Postmaster-General had proposed to establish a compulsory registration of money letters, with a shilling fee to be charged to the receiver when not paid by the sender. I pointed out the impracticability of the plan, and showed how the same end might be obtained by unobjectionable means. It was arranged that I should see the Postmaster-General and prepare a Report on the subject. Had my own plan of registration been adopted, the complaints on which the Postmaster-General's recommendation was based could scarcely have arisen:—

‘*November 8th, 1841.*—Saw Lord Lowther. He defends the Post Office plan so earnestly that I suspect it must be his own. At length, however, he partially admitted its defects, and listened rather impatiently to mine [my plan, not my defects, which would perhaps have had patient hearing]. Having an engagement, he requested me to come again to-morrow. One thing surprised me much—he could not see that an increase of lost letters, if only proportionate to the increase of letters transmitted, argued no increase of risk.’

* See p. 300.

To illustrate this further I will mention here that, whereas the number of money letters passing through the office had increased (according to Colonel Maberly) by tenfold, the number of missing money letters (as shown by a Parliamentary Return obtained a few months later) was no more than five and a-half-fold; so that the risk in transmission, the only thing really in question, had very sensibly diminished; an improvement the more remarkable, both because previously to the establishment of penny postage the number of such losses was in rapid increase, and because, as already mentioned, the Post Office had subsequently discontinued a practice of gratuitously registering all letters supposed to contain articles of value.

When I again called on Lord Lowther as requested, I found him still decidedly averse to lowering the registration fee, though otherwise half inclined to adopt my plan. As he desired further information, I undertook to send him my former Reports on the subject, as also the draft Report then in preparation, which I accordingly did. The draft, however, was returned without acquiescence, and his lordship's note seemed to me to be written in no friendly spirit: in consequence I consulted with my brothers and other friends.

'*November 23rd, 1841.*—They all agree with me as to the necessity of adopting decisive measures with a view of ascertaining whether or not the further improvements which form important parts of my plan are to be carried out fairly and speedily, and if not, that a regard to my own reputation will require me to resign. Also that the present is a case in which I should make a stand, without, however, pushing matters to an extreme all at once.'

I accordingly sent in my Report,* next day, to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, together with a letter,†

* 'Report of Postage Committee (1843),' Appendix, p. 7. † p. 11.

in which I offered my services, under the approval of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Postmaster-General, to carry the proposed measures into effect, undertaking the whole responsibility, and guaranteeing that there should be neither a stoppage of the mails nor any additional expense beyond the amount of the additional fees.

‘*November 24th, 1841.*—Wrote also to the Postmaster-General, expressing regret that I had not had the good fortune to satisfy him as to the practicability of the measures which I had recommended, and a hope that a proposal (*viz.*, the above) with which I had accompanied the Report would remove his objections.

‘*November 25th, 1841.*—The Chancellor of the Exchequer has read my Report, but apparently with little attention, for he is by no means master of the subject; he seems to consider the plan objectionable, but gives reasons for objecting to it which ought to recommend it. Among others, that almost everybody would take receipts, that is to say, that the gross revenue would be increased nearly fifty per cent! He appears to think, with the Post Office people, that the main object in view is to keep down the quantity of business. My offer to undertake the registration had evidently been overlooked. I called special attention to it, however, and the whole matter is to be referred *privately* to the Postmaster-General. I begged that it might be referred officially, in order that the objections, if any, might be recorded, but this was overruled, at least for the present.’

The Post Office bugbear of an overwhelming number of registered letters, which was to produce prodigious trouble and disorder at the “forward offices,” I completely exposed in a supplementary Report.*

As gradually appeared, however, instead of pushing forward an important improvement, I was only strengthening Post Office hostility. My reports, together with one subsequently received from the Post-

* ‘Report of Postage Committee (1843),’ Appendix, p. 11.

master-General, were placed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the hands of Mr. Trevelyan; who sent for me on December 29th, 1841, to talk over the matter. Unluckily, however, he had not read over my reports, being deterred by their unavoidable length, but called on me to give him their pith. To make this summary more conclusive, I proposed, first, to examine the reports sent in by the Postmaster-General; and at length, though Mr. Trevelyan doubted Mr. Goulburn's approbation, I prevailed upon him, by the mere plea of justice, to allow me to read it. I found, however, that while it was written in a most hostile spirit, it did not establish a single ground of objection to my plan, though my offer to undertake the necessary organisation was treated with scorn; and absurdly represented as one which would supersede the authority of the Postmaster-General. It was intimated, nevertheless, that the plan itself would be carried into execution if required, though it would lead to all sorts of evils; a prediction which I knew it would be very easy for the Post Office to fulfil.

Mr. Trevelyan, after considering all that I laid before him, told me that he agreed entirely with me, and had advised Mr. Goulburn accordingly.

Meantime, I had received some information from a private source.

'January 18th, 1842.—Mr. — reports that Lord L. is very apprehensive of attacks in Parliament for the no-progress hitherto made, and uneasy as to the working of his registration scheme. That in this state of mind he is inclined to rely more and more on Maberly, a tendency which he, —, thinks has been promoted by the officials having persuaded him that the activity of the Merchants' Committee, and the pressure from the public generally, is attributed to myself. — says Lord L. works very hard, getting up frequently at six in the morning, but

that his attention is given to small matters, and that he constantly changes his objects. This account agrees so well with the spirit manifested in Lord L.'s Report on registration that I cannot doubt its accuracy. Unfortunately Lord L. is both cold and suspicious, otherwise I would go to him and trust to the effect of a plain, open, and straightforward statement of the whole case. With such a man as Mr. Baring such would be the true policy; with Lord Lowther it would be useless, perhaps mischievous.

*'January 27th, 1842.—*Having prepared another letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I sent it in this morning.* In this letter I take no notice of the Postmaster-General's Report, but renew my offer to undertake the registration, and in so doing, state distinctly that I am ready to submit to the "*immediate*" authority of the Postmaster-General, so that there is no longer any pretence for misunderstanding my intentions. I also enumerate several important and urgent measures of Post Office improvement, which have occupied my attention while the question of registration has been pending, and propose to submit the details for consideration if the decision should be still further delayed. I think this letter will make it very difficult for them to prevent the progress of the measure if they are so disposed.'

My reason for entering into this detail on the subject of registration, was that, as already implied, it was my proceedings on this subject which eventually caused me the loss of my post. I had, it appeared, crossed with my advice a strong wish of the Postmaster-General's; and this, as I was afterwards told, was never forgiven, but became, more than any other single circumstance, the ground of the demand which he is said to have made soon afterwards for my dismissal. I have only to add that, even when my opposition was set aside, the course recommended by the Post Office was not taken; the warner was dismissed, but the warning was remembered; and though Lord Lowther remained Postmaster-General

* *'Report of Postage Committee of 1843,' p. 28.*

as much as three years after my removal, his plan of high-feed compulsory registration was never carried into effect.

I should have felt my own post less assailable had the Post Office revenue been more rapid in its recovery. I have already referred to such depression as was caused by increased Post Office expenditure, and by those circumstances which at the time depressed the revenue in every department; and it must be added that appearances were made worse by the manner in which the accounts of the Post Office were kept, the effect at this time being to reduce an actual increase for the quarter, amounting to between 30,000*l.* and 40,000*l.*, to an apparent decrease.

Later, however, the improvement began to be manifest:—

‘*April 6th, 1842.*—The revenue accounts show an increase of 90,000*l.* on the year. * * * The Post Office revenue is the only department * * * which does not show a deficiency on the quarter, a phenomenon which puzzles the Tory papers amazingly.’

It had already been shown in the statement made by Sir Robert Peel on March 12, 1842, that a strong disposition existed somewhere to make the loss resulting from the adoption of penny postage appear as large as possible, nor could I doubt as to the quarter in which this disposition existed. Indeed subsequent events made everything clear.

The inference which it was intended that the public should draw from the statement that the cost of the packet service exceeded the whole Post Office revenue, long served to mislead that large portion of the public which, for want of time or ability to examine, takes plausible appearances for facts. The fallacy, nevertheless, was fully exposed within two months of its first appearance.

Lord Monteagle, on June 21, 1842, in a debate on the Income Tax,* said :—

‘When his noble friend (Lord Fitzgerald) adverted to the revenue formerly derived from the Post Office, and stated that the whole of the revenue had disappeared, his noble friend was labouring under a very great mistake. The expense of the packet service, which was said to swallow up the whole of the revenue now derived from the Post Office, had no more to do with the penny postage than the expense of the war in Affghanistan or China. It was as distinct from the Post Office as the expense of the army or navy.’

At a subsequent period, as will appear in its proper place, I was called upon to expose the fallacy more in detail; but everybody knows that an error once adopted is slow of eradication; and this particular one, gross as it really is, is not only still to be met with here and there among the public, but has actually been thrice put forth, since my final withdrawal from office, in the Annual Report of the Postmaster-General;† so that even now it is far from superfluous to point out, that in comparing the fiscal results of the new system with those of the old, the cost of the packet service should be excluded from the one as it always was from the other; nor is it less necessary to urge that whenever it is deemed advisable to maintain a line of conveyance for political purposes, or for any other purposes not really postal, the expense, barring a due charge for such postal service as may incidentally be performed, should be charged, not to the Post Office, but to its appropriate department; confusion of accounts being always detrimental to economy and obstructive to reform.

Naturally, however, I received, during this difficult

* ‘Hansard,’ vol. lxiv. p. 321.

† ‘Tenth Report of the Postmaster-General,’ pp. 37, 38; ‘Eleventh Report of the Postmaster-General,’ pp. 16, 17; ‘Twelfth Report of the Postmaster-General,’ pp. 34, 35.

period, but limited support from without. The public, satisfied with having obtained the adoption of the penny rate, the reform in which it was most interested, bestirred itself little in advocacy of those further improvements in which its interest was less direct and far less obvious; many persons, indeed, regarding penny postage pure and simple as the be-all and end-all of the matter. Of course, I could no longer communicate with the public, my mouth being officially sealed; and I may observe here, that it were well for the public to understand how completely this is the case with all subordinate officers. Whatever may be their views on the proceedings of their department, whatever schemes they may form or adopt for improvement, or, on the other hand, whatever injustice may be done to them by their official superiors, or whatever charges may be made against them in Parliament, by the public press, or otherwise—comment, or even statement of facts, is forbidden by official rule; a rule, which being unknown to the public, often leads to erroneous inference, and encourages attacks which otherwise would be regarded as cowardly.

From one more quarter, however, useful assistance was given at this time; the Merchants' Committee sending in a memorial to the Treasury, signed by every one of its members, Whig or Tory, urging the complete execution of my plan, and following up this step with a deputation to the Postmaster-General, which ended in their receiving an assurance that Lord Lowther was desirous of carrying out my measures fully and fairly "equally so with his predecessor." Of the value of the assurance the reader may easily judge by the parallel.

The following was not a little encouraging:—

'January 26th, 1842.—Received a letter from Mr. George Stokes, Hon. Secretary of the Parker Society (a Society of

more than 4000 members, the object of which is to reprint the works of the early Reformers), stating that the very existence of the Society is owing to penny postage. The whole letter is very gratifying.'

I must now trace the chain of circumstances which more immediately preceded my dismissal, though the connection will in the outset be scarcely more visible to the reader than it was, at the time, to myself.

I have already spoken of the letter which I had addressed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the day when he succeeded Mr. Baring in office, and mentioned the result, which was for the time satisfactory. I have also spoken of my attempts relative to registration, and the offer of my services, subject to the Chancellor's approval, and that of the Postmaster-General, for the organisation, and, "till fully established," the execution of the measures proposed.

The letter in which this offer was made, and which is dated November 24, 1841, having received no reply, was followed, on December 2, by a short note, covering a further report on the same subject.*

On January 27, 1842, no reply having yet been received to either of these two communications, I again wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging that, if registration could not be dealt with, I might be allowed to proceed with some other part of my plan, giving at the same time a list of measures out of which one or more might be selected.†

This letter also obtaining no reply, I wrote again on March 7, mentioning other parts of my plan which might be introduced pending the question of registration, adverting to fresh evidence of their feasibility and advantage, and again requesting that

* See 'Report of Select Committee on Postage (1843),' Appendix, p. 11.

† 'Report of Select Committee on Postage (1843),' p. 28.

I might be allowed to proceed in their introduction under the authority of the Postmaster-General.

I added the actual results thus far obtained, viz., that the chargeable letters annually delivered in the United Kingdom had already increased from 75 millions to 208 millions, the increase in the London district post letters being from about 13 to 23 millions; that the illicit conveyance of letters was in effect suppressed; that the gross revenue was about two-thirds of the largest amount ever obtained, and nearly, if not fully, as great as that under the fourpenny rate; that the net revenue amounted to about 565,000*l.*, showing an increase, notwithstanding many counteracting causes, of 100,000*l.* upon that for the first year of penny postage; and lastly, that the inland, or penny post letters, were decidedly the most profitable, if not the only profitable, part of the Post Office business.*

The letter concluded as follows :—

‘ Looking to the progress now making, under the unfavourable circumstances to which I have adverted, I see no reason to doubt that, if the measure were fully and zealously carried into effect, a very few years, with a revived trade, would suffice to realise the expectations which I held out. I also firmly believe that those circumstances which have tended in no inconsiderable degree to diminish the utility of the measure * * * may be avoided; and that without any increase of expense, but simply by improved arrangements.

* * * * *

‘ Let me hope, Sir, that I may not be considered as unreasonably urgent in thus addressing you. Let me beg of you to consider with indulgence the peculiarity of my position: that I have been appointed, in the words of the Treasury minute, to assist “in carrying into effect the penny postage;” that, although I have no direct influence over the arrangements, they are generally supposed by the public to be under my control; that, my name being identified with

* ‘ Report of Select Committee on Postage (1843),’ p. 29.

the plan, I am, to a great degree, regarded as responsible for its success. On these grounds I confidently, but respectfully, appeal to your kindness and justice to afford me the means of satisfying public expectation by gradually carrying the plan into execution in its fulness and integrity.'

To this letter I received, a fortnight afterwards, a brief reply, if that can be called reply in which no real answer is given, and no definite question even touched upon.*

I subsequently wrote two other letters (one on March 23, and the other on May 31) of the same general tenour, but with every modification which I could think of as likely to lead to the desired result;† but to neither of these did I ever receive any reply; so that the short and evasive answer just mentioned was the only notice ever taken of the various attempts indicated in the foregoing letters to obtain attention to the several improvements which I sought to introduce. I have only to add that all the measures then so slighted are now in operation, tending alike to public convenience and to the increase of the revenue.

Meantime, other circumstances were occurring which eventually brought matters to a crisis.

The proposed establishment of a day mail to Newcastle, in accordance with my recommendation, having rendered it desirable that I should visit that town, and Mr. Hodgson Hinde, the Member for Newcastle, having urged that my journey should be made without delay, I applied to Sir George Clerk and obtained his ready acquiescence. Wishing at the same time to visit some of the country offices, and scrupulously desiring to avoid any approach to breach of rule, I wrote to Colonel Maberly for authority so to do, but this request being referred by him to the Postmaster-General, and representations

* 'Report of Select Committee on Postage (1843),' p. 30. † p. 31.

being made by the latter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the end was that the sanction to my journey was altogether withdrawn, the management of the matter being handed over to the Post Office; with what prospect of good result I leave the reader to judge. This, however, was not all; for soon afterwards, viz., on July 12, I received a letter from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, not in reply to any of mine, but announcing that from the ensuing 14th of September (when my third year at the Treasury would end) my "further assistance" would be "dispensed with;" the notification, however, concluding with the following acknowledgment:—

‘In making this communication I gladly avail myself of the opportunity of expressing my sense of the satisfactory manner in which, during my tenure of office, you have discharged the several duties which have been from time to time committed to you.’

Being very unwell at the time when this letter reached me, and of course far from benefited by its perusal, I was constrained to apply to Sir George Clerk for a short leave of absence—a request readily granted. After a little repose I prepared an answer to Mr. Goulburn’s letter, which after much reconsideration and consultation with my brothers, I sent in on July 29th. Of course its general purpose was to urge that the late decision might be reconsidered; but, to ease matters, I offered, as I had done on a previous occasion, to work for a time without salary.*

Meanwhile, however, additional discouragement had occurred from the fact that, in reply to an objection raised against my salary by Colonel Sibthorpe, the intended discontinuance of my services had been announced by Sir George Clerk in the House of Commons.

* Parliamentary Return, 1843, No. 119, p. 5.

On August 1st, I received a note from Mr. Moffatt, of which the following is an extract:—

‘I perused with great concern the flagrant announcement made in the House on Friday evening touching the rejection of your future services.

‘Memory supplies me with no parallel to this treatment; it embodies an act of public dishonesty, which, if permitted, would be alike discreditable to the Government which proposed, and to the assembly which should sanction such an arrangement.

‘August 9th.—Matthew has taken up the matter earnestly; he has seen Brougham, Wilde, Villiers, and Aglionby, who express great anger and surprise now they understand what is intended. It seems they had assumed that I was to be employed in some other department; this, they say, is the general impression, which accounts for the apathy on the subject hitherto. Some course or other will, I expect, be decided on to-morrow. Of course I take no part in the matter myself.’

After much consultation, however, it was deemed expedient to defer all action until the next session of Parliament; and though the announcement of this decision was little to my satisfaction, of course I kept my thoughts to myself.

About a week afterwards I received a letter from the Chancellor of the Exchequer in reply to my letter of July 29, which, however, though it spoke in somewhat elaborate approbation of my services, repeated his decision as to their discontinuance.*

‘August 20th.—I want to make the remnant of time as effective as possible, and with this view generally get to work soon after six in the morning.’

In addition to matters already mentioned, and others that I pass over, there are three which must not be omitted.

The first was the transfer of the Channel Island

* Parliamentary Return, 1843, No. 119, p. 8.

mail-packets from Weymouth to Southampton, which had been proposed by certain gentlemen of Jersey, who offered to perform the new service at a reduction of 6000*l.* a year on the cost of the old, but which had been objected to by the Post Office on the ground that it would delay the foreign correspondence of the Islands. I succeeded in showing that, instead of delay, there would be, on the whole, a considerable acceleration, while their correspondence with this country would be accelerated in a high degree.

The second was the postal communication between London and Dublin: respecting this I devised a plan by which the time would be diminished by fully one-third, and a saving effected to the extent of 30,000*l.* a year, the change also facilitating the discontinuance of the Milford and Waterford packets—a measure then under consideration.

The third related to economy in respect of mail-guards, the cost of which “increased between 1836 and 1841, from 10,513*l.* to 28,627*l.*, though the number has increased only from three hundred and fifty-three to three hundred and fifty-six, and ought, notwithstanding the addition of day mails, to have greatly diminished, first, because each railway absorbs the mails of several lines, and, secondly, because a guard can obviously travel much further on a railway than on a common road. The reason assigned for increasing the salaries of the guards, was the loss of fees in consequence of the use of railways; but the greatest increase is in Ireland, where, in 1841, the only railway in use was the short line from Dublin to Kingston. In Ireland, between 1836 and 1841, the number of guards having decreased from eighty-five to seventy-seven, the expense increased from 2935*l.* to 7656*l.*”*

Of the minute from which I have just quoted no notice from any quarter ever reached me.

* ‘Report of Select Committee on Postage (1843),’ p. 10.

I resume my narrative :—

‘*September 10th.*—Received an unexpected summons from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He has read my Report on the Channel Islands packets ; stated some objections to the plan, which I removed. Don’t know whether he will adopt it or not. He was very cordial and friendly, and began to express his regret at the necessity under which he felt himself as to the termination of my engagement, &c. I told him that I did not intend to avail myself of the interview to reopen the question, and merely wished to thank him for his intention of recording in a Treasury Minute approval of my services. I described shortly the Report which I gave to Mr. Trevelyan * * * and told him of another Report now in hand,* adding that I was anxious to turn the remnant of time to the best possible account. He intimated the probability of his applying to me hereafter for special assistance in Post Office affairs, if I had no objection ; thanked me earnestly for what I had done, and shook hands with apparent warmth. His manner, now and heretofore, and the tenour of his letters go far to confirm the impression that he feels that he is acting unjustly, and under compulsion I believe of the Postmaster-General, who is said to command five or six votes in the House of Commons.’

After my loss of office, my proposed improvement relative to the Channel Islands packets, though still long delayed and obstinately resisted, was, as I learnt by the public prints, at length effected ; being in fact forced upon the Post Office by the Treasury, which, as I was afterwards able to ascertain, used my minutes as its means of compulsion.

‘*September 14th.*—My engagement terminates to-day. * * * Found on inquiry that the Postmaster-General has not yet sent in the estimate on foreign and colonial postage, nor answered the minute respecting the reduction of space in the railway carriages. Also that the registration question remains in *statu quo*. The revenue payments for

* ‘On Postal Communication between London and Dublin,’ already mentioned.

the quarter up to the 10th instant amount to 112,000*l.*; or 33,000*l.* more than at the corresponding date of last year.

‘*September 17th.*—On a review of this journal I find that the savings which I have effected or proposed since the present Government came in (September 3, 1841) amount at a low estimate to 80,000*l.* per annum, of which 51,000*l.* is the amount since I received notice of the termination of my engagement. And these savings are in no instance obtained by a sacrifice of convenience on the part of the public, but in many [instances] are the result of measures tending greatly to increase such convenience.

‘*September 22nd.*—Lord Brougham, who has seen a copy of the correspondence between Mr. Goulburn and myself, pronounces my case to be “irresistible.” He has kindly volunteered to write to Lord Ashburton, who is daily expected to return from America, to get him to see Sir Robert Peel on the subject. * * * Sir Thomas Wilde, who had previously seen the same correspondence, also expresses a strong opinion as to the strength of my case, and has very kindly volunteered to undertake it in Parliament. A strong case in such hands will indeed, I trust, prove irresistible.

‘*September 23rd.*—Many of the Liberal papers are attacking the Government on account of my dismissal. To-day the *Post* replies in a very dishonest manner.

‘*September 26th.*—Yesterday and to-day prepared, with Matthew’s assistance, a letter to Sir Robert Peel, stating shortly the leading facts of my case, tendering proofs of each part, and earnestly begging an audience.

‘*September 28th.*—Sent in my letter to Sir Robert Peel (dated yesterday).* Sent also a copy, with a short note dated to-day, to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

‘Received from the Treasury a letter (27th inst.) passing my accounts and containing the following paragraph: “I am also commanded by their Lordships to take this opportunity of stating that they consider it due to you, on the termination of your engagement with the Government, to express to you the approbation with which they have regarded your zealous exertions in the execution of the duties which have been intrusted to you, and how materially the efficiency of the Post Office arrangements has been

* Parliamentary Return, 1843, No. 119, p. 10.

promoted by the care and intelligence evinced by you in the consideration of the various important questions which have been referred to you."

'*October 12th.*—Dined with Mr. Moffatt at the Reform Club. Showed him the recent correspondence with Goulburn and Peel, and discussed with him confidentially future proceedings. He is very much in earnest, and desirous of assisting, through the Committee, as much as possible.'

Three days later I received the following letter from Sir Robert Peel :—

Drayton Manor, October 13th, 1842.

SIR,

I beg leave to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated the 27th of September. It reached me the day after I had left London.

Had I received it previously to my departure, I should have acceded to your request for a personal interview, though I consider the subject of your letter fitter for written than for verbal communication.

Since I received it I have referred to the letter which you addressed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the 29th of July last, and to the Minutes of the Board of Treasury respecting your appointment, and have given to the subject generally the best consideration in my power. It had indeed been brought under my notice by Mr. Goulburn, at the time that his letters of the 11th of July and of the 11th of August were addressed to you.

I am bound to state to you that I entirely concur in the opinion expressed by Mr. Goulburn in that of the 11th of August, that the continued employment of an independent officer, for the purposes for which it is urged by you, would necessarily lead either to the entire supercession of those who are by their offices responsible for the management of the Post-office department, or to a conflict of authority, highly prejudicial to the public service.

I entertain a due sense of the motives by which your conduct in respect to Post-office arrangements has been actuated, and of the zeal and fidelity with which you have discharged the duties committed to you; I cannot doubt that there are still important* improvements in those arrangements to be

* The word "important" occurs in the original MS. letter, though no doubt by accidental misprint, it is omitted in the official printed copy.

effected, but I must presume that they can be effected through the intervention of the regularly constituted and the responsible authority, namely, the Postmaster-General, acting under the superintendence and control of the Board of Treasury.

I have, &c.

Rowland Hill, Esq.

ROBERT PEEL.

My dismissal therefore was now complete and absolute. My right to complete my own plan was denied, all opportunity for so doing withheld, and the measure was to be handed over to men who had opposed it stage by stage, whose reputation was pledged to its failure, and who had unquestionably been caballing to obtain my expulsion from office. Of the feeling under which Mr. Goulburn acted in this matter I have already given my opinion; indeed I had now become fully aware that the responsibility of the act did not rest on him. As regards Sir Robert Peel, with whom the decision of course lay, to suppose that the reasons which he gave were those which constituted his real ground of action, or that he could have considered his letter as any valid answer to mine, would be an imputation on his understanding which I shall not venture to make. By whatever necessity he may have been constrained, I cannot but think that as he wrote he must have felt some little of that painful feeling which unquestionably pressed hard upon him in more than one important passage of his political career.

The following reply closes the correspondence.*

Bayswater, October 18th, 1842.

SIR,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 13th instant, confirming the decision of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

In closing this painful correspondence with the Treasury, permit me, Sir, to make one observation with the hope of

* Parliamentary Return, 1843, No. 119, p. 11.

removing from your mind the impression that I sought to be reinstated in an office which must impede the public service by introducing a conflict of powers in the administration of the Post Office. I would beg respectfully to recall to your recollection that the Post Office is not only under the general control of the Treasury, but acts with regard to matters of importance under its immediate and specific directions; and that my suggestions, being addressed to the superior authority, could not create any collision between the Post Office and myself. When they were rejected by the Treasury, I always submitted, as it was my duty to do, with implicit deference. When, on the other hand, they were adopted, they became of course the orders of the Board, to which the authorities of the Post Office were equally bound to defer. This arrangement, which is, I submit, in exact conformity with the long-established practice defining the subordinate functions of the Post Office, was the one directed by the terms of my appointment; and as long as such an arrangement is faithfully observed or duly enforced, it would appear that no danger can exist of the evil arising to which reference is made.

But even if these objections were valid against the particular office in question, you will, I am sure, do me the justice to remember that, in my letter to yourself, as well as in those to Mr. Goulburn which form part of this correspondence, I have expressed my readiness to accept any situation in which my services could be effective to the establishment of my plan.

In conclusion, I beg leave to express my thanks for the kind regard to my feelings which dictated those expressions of approbation with which you, in common with Mr. Goulburn, have been pleased to acknowledge my humble services. They afford me, I respectfully assure you, no slight consolation under the sense of injustice which at this moment weighs upon my mind. You are not unacquainted, Sir, with the long and severe labour which I had to undergo before my plan was adopted by the country and sanctioned by Parliament. When I was called upon to assist in carrying the measure into execution, the Government stipulated that I should apply my whole time to this duty, exclusive of all other occupations. It is quite true that the part of the agreement relating to salary was made certain for a limited period only; but as the purpose of my engagement was the

performance of a specific task, I little thought that limitation open to a construction which precludes me from fulfilling my undertaking, more especially when the question was relieved from all embarrassment on the score of salary. If I could have imagined that I should be dismissed before my plan was fully developed in action, whatever time might be found to be really necessary for that object, I should have been little justified in entering upon the task. The ultimate advantage which was to accrue to me was not of a pecuniary nature. It was believed, and rightly believed, that I aspired to the reputation which might fairly be expected to attend the conduct of so great a measure to its completion, and that with such a result of my exertions I should be well satisfied. Deprived of that conduct, I am deprived of the means of earning my only reward.

I have, &c.

ROWLAND HILL.

Rt. Hon. Sir ROBERT PEEL, Bart.
&c. &c. &c.

CHAPTER XI.

OUT OF OFFICE. (1842-3.)

ALL being thus decided, and my last duty performed, I saw no reason to delay any longer that relaxation of which I now stood much in need, and during the next month the entries in my journal are comparatively few.

While I was resting my friends were at work :—

*‘November 9th, 1842.—*Matthew informs me that Lord Brougham had a long conversation with Sir James Graham, on the 7th instant, on the subject of my treatment, in the course of which he (Lord B.) told Sir James Graham that in his opinion the Government was making a great practical mistake, and intimated that I must of course defend myself, and that he, from his long acquaintance with myself and opinion of the plan, should feel bound to take up the cudgels on my behalf in the House of Lords. That Sir James Graham appeared also to think that a mistake had been made, and promised to speak to some other members of the Cabinet on the subject. Lord Brougham subsequently wrote to Sir James Graham a letter to be laid before Peel.’

To give to the public such a knowledge of facts as would enable it to do justice either to my plan or myself, it was obviously important to publish that correspondence with the Treasury in which I had again and again urged improvement, and in which my application had been as often either neglected or evaded ; in which, also, I had received notice of my

dismissal, had deprecated this step, and had been informed of persistence in the intention, with such show of reason as had been vouchsafed me. Being aware, however, that such publication was likely to be the subject of attack, I was careful, before venturing on it, to ascertain my right to make it; and this I knew must depend upon precedent and require reference to authority :—

‘*November 26th.*—Matthew applied to Earl Spencer for his opinion.’

The following is his lordship’s letter :—

Longford, November 25th, 1842.

MY DEAR SIR,

As the correspondence you sent me looked rather alarming as to bulk, I delayed reading it till I had the opportunity of a journey. I took this opportunity yesterday.

I can see no public grounds why your brother should not publish it if he thinks fit. As a question of personal prudence I think the thing more doubtful, but I think your letter only goes to his *right* to publish it. I have no business therefore to say anything more than that I think he has a right to publish it.

You know, however, that I sometimes have done more than answer a question put to me simply, and I will do so now by adding to my answer that if I was in his place I would not publish it. * * *

Yours most truly,
SPENCER.

M. D. HILL, Esq.

“*November 29th.*—To-day the Merchants’ Committee [which had applied for an interview early in August] has seen Sir Robert Peel. They strongly urged the necessity for completing the measure—their want of confidence in the Post Office—their confidence in me, and the great satisfaction it would be to the public to see me restored to office. Peel satisfied the deputation that he was sincerely desirous of carrying out the measure, and Goulburn, who was present, assured them that, whatever might have been the feeling originally entertained by the Post Office, all there were now earnest

friends of the measure! (It did not occur to the Committee to inquire where, then, lay the danger of "collision.") Peel invited the Committee to send in a statement of those parts of the plan which they still wished to see carried into effect; but he stated that a return from the Post Office showed that with the exception of about 100,000*l.* per annum the net revenue was obtained from foreign and colonial letters. This statement, which he made in an early stage of the conversation, threw the Committee quite aback; for though I had prepared them, as I thought, to distrust all information derived from the Post Office, their want of familiarity with the subject, and the confident manner with which the statement was made, caused them to believe it.'

The Committee at my suggestion subsequently applied for a copy of this return, but it was prudently withheld; and, with equal prudence, no reason was assigned for the refusal. Of this return, however, more will appear by-and-by.

Meantime, the question of publishing the correspondence remaining still undecided, I sought further advice.

On December 4th I received the following letter from Mr. Baring:—

Brighton, Dec. 3, 1842.

DEAR SIR,

I hope to be at Lee on Tuesday, and shall be at your service on Wednesday morning. But if you are not afraid of a bad dinner, which you probably will get the first day of our return, you had better come down on Tuesday, dine and sleep at Lee, and we will talk over the matter on Wednesday.

Yours very truly,

F. T. BARING.

After careful perusal and reperusal of the correspondence, Mr. Baring, in the course of several conversations, pronounced my line of conduct very judicious, and the conduct of Government very shabby. He said it was absurd to expect that the Post Office would satisfactorily carry into effect the

remaining parts of my plan, and that consequently my dismissal was most unfair towards the measure. He added that, even without reference to my plan, my retention as a permanent officer would be useful as a check upon the proceedings of the Post Office; and that such retention would be in conformity with the system of Treasury management, which consists in having an officer to check each subordinate department. He assured me that it was never his intention that my services should cease as a matter of course at the expiration of the year mentioned in his last letter, the fair interpretation of which was that he considered it advantageous to continue my services indefinitely, but that as he was then leaving office, and as there were rumours of an intention on the part of the next Government to abandon my plan, he did not feel justified in giving me a claim for more than one year's salary. These opinions he would be prepared to state in Parliament. He thought it probable that Lord Lowther's jealousy was the cause of the mischief, and that that jealousy was excited by my opposition to his plan of registration, which he remarked, if carried into effect, would have created an uproar throughout the country. He was of opinion that I had a right to publish the correspondence, but feared that by so doing, I should bar the door against other employment, to which he regarded me as having a claim that otherwise would probably be recognised, even by the Government then in power; so that he was rather averse to my taking any step before the meeting of Parliament. I replied, that although I, of course, should be glad to obtain other employment under Government, my chief anxiety was to satisfy the public that I had not misled them by holding out expectations which could not be realised, and that although I would carefully consider his kind advice, my present inclination was to sacrifice all other con-

siderations to the accomplishment of this object; on which he remarked that, if not satisfied with the discussion in Parliament, I could still publish the correspondence. He expressed an opinion that it would not be practicable to bring before Parliament copies of my Reports, or those of the Post Office, to the Treasury, inasmuch as such Reports being considered confidential, the rule is to refuse their production. This was a serious disappointment, as I had depended mainly on the publication of these Reports as a means of showing the manner in which my duties had been discharged, and the nature of the opposition of the Post Office. Nothing could be more open than Mr. Baring's conduct.

'Same day.—Matthew has seen Lord Spencer, who came to town for the Cattle Show. His view coincides almost exactly with Mr. Baring's, differing only (if I have understood Mr. B. rightly) in thinking that the late, as well as the present, Government would disapprove of any appeal to the public, except through Parliament.'

As Mr. Warburton concurred in disapproving immediate publication, I yielded to the advice of so many influential friends, though my own opinion was still strongly in favour of the prompter course.

Meanwhile there came in from various members of Parliament and many other friends letters of sympathy and support. The following, addressed to my brother Matthew, is from the late Lord Campbell :—

New Street, Dec. 22, 1842.

MY DEAR HILL,

I have perused with great interest the correspondence respecting your brother and the Penny Postage.

I very much regret that the Government did not continue to avail themselves of his services, and I think the public are aggrieved by losing him.

As between him and the Government, I suppose that in strictness they may justify what they have done; although,

certainly, the spirit of his engagement was that he should superintend the working of the plan till it had come into full operation.

If the matter should be discussed in the House of Lords, I should feel no difficulty in expressing my opinion that it would have been for the public good that he should have been continued in the service, and that the successful result of the great measure which he originated is endangered by his dismissal.

I remain,

Yours truly,

CAMPBELL.

M. D. HILL, Esq.

The following kind and characteristic letter from Mr. Cobden is of somewhat later date:—

MY DEAR SIR,

Newcastle-on-Tyne, 20th January, 1843.

The men of the League are your devoted servants in every way that can be useful to you. Colonel Thompson, Bright, and I, have *blessed you* not a few times in the course of our agitating tour. * * * I go back to Manchester to-morrow, after a very gratifying tour in Scotland. "The heather's on fire."

Believe me,

Yours very truly,

R. COBDEN.

R. HILL, Esq.

This was followed, within a week, by a second letter, in which it will be seen that the warmth of his feelings led him into very strong expressions. These I do not suppress, as every one can make for them the allowance due to time, circumstance, and a generous nature:—

Manchester, 26th January, 1843.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have read over the correspondence, and, so far as success in placing the Government in the wrong goes, you will be pronounced triumphant by all who will read it. But nothing is more true than the remark in your brother's excellent letter, that the force of public opinion cannot be brought to bear upon the authorities to compel them to work

out details. So far as your object in that direction is concerned, your correspondence will, I suspect, be nugatory. If your object be to justify yourself in the eyes of the public, *that*, I submit, is supererogatory. You cannot stand better than you do with the impartial British public. You will get no further facilities from Tory functionaries. They hate the whole thing *with a diabolical hatred*. And well they may. It is a terrible engine for upsetting monopoly and corruption: witness our League operations, the *spawn of your penny postage*! Now, let me deal frankly and concisely with you. I want to see you remunerated for the work you have done. The labourer is worthy of his hire. The country is in your debt. An organised plan is alone necessary to insure you a national subscription of a sum of money sufficient to reimburse you for time, trouble and annoyance incurred and expended in your great social revolution. * * * A public subscription—a really national one—would give you power and independence, and when the next change of Government takes place you would be in the ascendant. Until then I expect no hearty co-operation in carrying out your details. We must be content, in the meantime, to prevent the Tories from robbing us of any substantial part of the principle, and I think we have bulldogs enough in the House now to prevent that. I should like to have some talk with you about this matter. Meantime, excuse my plainness, and don't suspect me of wishing to make you a *sordid* patriot. You see what an effect the 50,000*l.* League Fund is producing: a similar demonstration in favour of the author of Postage Reform, and a seat in Parliament in prospective, would have a like effect upon the enemy.

Believe me,

Yours truly,

R. COBDEN.

ROWLAND HILL, Esq.

Very different, but no less characteristic of the writer, is the following letter, received some months later, from Thomas Hood:—

17 Elm Tree Road, St. John's Wood,
1st May.

MY DEAR SIR,

* * * * *

I have seen so many instances of folly and ingratitude similar to those you have met with, that it would

never surprise me to hear of the railway people some day, finding their trains running on so well, proposing to discharge the engines.

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I am, my dear Sir,
Yours very truly,
THOMAS HOOD.

R. HILL, Esq.

Meanwhile, I felt nowise daunted by late events, but rather filled with fresh zeal; for although I never willingly entered into a conflict, yet when one was forced upon me, or stood between me and what I deemed right, I was by no means backward at the work.

One of my earliest moves was towards personal and domestic economy. While I was in receipt of a large salary, and had my attention fully occupied, and indeed my powers heavily taxed, I had allowed my expenditure to attain dimensions unsuitable to my present condition. Of course I intended to seek new occupation, but this would require time; and, meanwhile, I felt that if I would act independently I must make myself independent of circumstances. I therefore entered at once upon a course of vigorous retrenchment, and partly by my efforts, but much more by the zealous and most efficient co-operation of my dear wife, our expenditure was soon brought within very narrow limits. Without any change of house or diminution in number of servants, our disbursements were soon reduced by one half, and it was only in the first year after the change that expense exceeded income; and this, I may add, is the solitary instance of such irregularity in the whole course of my life.

As the parliamentary session approached, however, I had to turn my attention more and more to the work of preparation for the duty which I

expected it to bring. I therefore put my papers in the most perfect order—a proceeding which has greatly facilitated the writing of this part of my narrative.

Sir Thomas Wilde having very kindly undertaken to lay my case before Parliament, I could not but feel some anxiety as to the view that might be taken of this course by Mr. Wallace, who had himself acted as leader in earlier days. I therefore wrote to him on the subject as delicately as I could, and a fortnight afterwards (February 3rd, 1843), when he came to town for the parliamentary session, called upon him, of course in some trepidation. I quote from my journal:—

‘He behaves nobly, as he always has done, fully acquiescing in the arrangement with regard to Sir Thomas Wilde, and expressing his own readiness to follow Sir Thomas’s lead.’

Meanwhile, however, my attention was called to considerations of a somewhat different character:—

‘*February 8th.*—Met Mr. [afterwards Sir James] Stephen of the Colonial Office in Piccadilly, and at his request walked with him to the Colonial Office. On the way he urged me to apply to the Government for employment, saying that he felt sure my claim would be acknowledged—intimating that I might expect such an appointment as a Commissionership of Customs. I replied, that such a step would be considered as a tacit engagement on my part not to bring my case before the public; that other friends had recommended a similar course, under the impression that the complimentary expressions in the letters from the Treasury were intended by Government to suggest it, but that, after mature deliberation, I had decided not to do anything which should prevent my making known to the public the true causes of the small amount of revenue actually obtained, as compared with my anticipations, and justifying my conduct throughout. Mr. Stephen rejoined that he did not doubt I might stipulate to do all this, providing that I refrained from attacking the Government, and yet obtain

lucrative and honourable employment. To this I said I of course could not object, and he recommended that two of the leading merchants or bankers in the city, of opposite politics, should make the application on my behalf. I promised to consider the suggestion, but requested that he would, in the meantime, read the correspondence, a copy of which I sent him the same afternoon.

‘*February 11th.*—Prepared a memorandum * * * called on Mr. Stephen, read it to him, and left it with him; he expressing a desire to reconsider the matter, with a view perhaps of making such inquiries of Goulburn, with whom he is intimate, as would enable him to judge of the probable success of such an application as he had suggested. I desired that he would do whatever he thought best, clearly understanding, however, that I was no party to anything of the kind.

‘*February 15th.*—Mr. Stephen writes that he has ascertained that nothing can be done unless I submit to be gagged, and not very much even then; so the whole ends in smoke.

‘*Same day.*—Wrote to Mr. Stephen thanking him for his kindness, which, from the very unreserved manner in which he spoke of the Government, I feel very strongly; but of course declining to apply to Government.’

About three weeks later, Mr. Goulburn, in reply to an application made by Mr. Hutt, on behalf of Sir Thomas Wilde, for the production of my correspondence with the Treasury, refused to give more than a few letters, withholding those of chief importance; and though, on being pressed, he somewhat enlarged the grant, it still remained very imperfect. Unsatisfactory, however, as was this concession, motion was made accordingly:—

‘*March 29th.*—My correspondence with the Treasury. The printed copies were delivered this morning. By the omission of all the letters urging progress in the plan, Goulburn’s notice of dismissal is brought into juxtaposition with a minute of December 24th, 1841 (of which I never heard till now), confirming the extension of my engagement for one year from September 14th, 1841, and made to appear as the

natural sequence of such minute, instead of being, as it was in fact, the answer to my complaints of no progress, and of Post Office interference to prevent my journey to Newcastle. The whole thing is cunningly done, and it shows that the five weeks taken to prepare the correspondence have not been lost. The case is so much damaged, however, that I have determined to give the papers a very limited circulation, and to press on Wilde to consent to the publication of the whole. Sir Robert Peel, in his letter to me, admits that "important improvements" still remain to be effected; but in the printed copy the word "important" is dropped.*

To my surprise, the strength of my case, grievously impaired as it was by this maiming of the correspondence, was nevertheless recognised in one of the journals regularly supporting the Government:—

‘*March 30th.*—The *Morning Herald* gives the correspondence with Sir Robert Peel, and has a leader, sneering of course at penny postage, but expressing an opinion that I have been unjustly treated, and ought to have a place or a pension.’

This is the last entry in my journal for the present. On the one hand, I became so engrossed in preparation for the coming conflict, a conflict which seemed to me as one almost of life and death, that I had no time to spare save for pressing demands; while, on the other hand, the motive to record was greatly weakened since my exclusion from the Treasury. For the history of the following three years and a half, my dependence is on documents, parliamentary or otherwise, produced during the period (all of which I have carefully preserved), and on such recollections as are suggested by their perusal.

On April 10th, a petition for inquiring into the state of the Post Office, prepared by myself and in my own name, was presented to the House of Commons by Mr. Baring; and on the following night,

* *Vide* Return, 1843, No. 119.

Mr. Hawes gave notice that Sir Thomas Wilde would call the attention of the House to the same soon after the Easter holidays—a notice, however, which from various causes had to be repeated several times before being acted upon.

Of this petition, which appears at length in the Report of the Committee,* I will merely mention here that, after reference to my appointment and subsequent dismissal, after statements as to the very incomplete introduction of my plan, evidence as to the hopelessness of its completion being effected by the Post Office, and representations as to the vast interests at stake, I concluded by expressing my desire “to submit the truth of the foregoing allegations to the severest scrutiny,” and by petitioning for the necessary inquiry.

This petition was presently backed by another from eight members† of the Mercantile Committee, so often mentioned before, in which, after briefly adverting to the beneficial effect of the improvement already made, the petitioners, expressing an earnest desire for the completion of the plan, prayed for inquiry with a view to that end.

I now felt that the time was come when my friends should be put in full possession of the facts of the case; and consequently, having printed all of the correspondence which had been applied for in Parliament, that withheld as well as that granted, I sent copies, marked “strictly confidential,” to the members of the Mercantile Committee and some others of my friends, prefacing it with an introduction, in which I justified the proceeding—first, by the declaration of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that his denial was made on the ground that the part which had

* ‘Report of Select Committee on Postage (1843),’ p. 54.

† Their names are as follows:—George Moffatt, William Ellis, James Pattison, L. P. Wilson, John Dillon, John Travers, J. H. Gledstanes, W. A. Wilkinson, all from the first warm supporters of my plan.

been withheld was unnecessary, no allegation being made as to inconvenience to the public service, and, secondly, by the high authority which I had for saying that I had a right, looking to the nature of the correspondence itself, to official usage, and all other circumstances, to place the whole before the public.

This step, taken on April 13th, was on the 19th condemned in the House of Commons by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Goulburn, but defended by the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Baring.

It was not until May 1st that I obtained a copy of the return upon which Sir Robert Peel, in the preceding November, based his injurious and erroneous statement that the Post Office yielded but 100,000*l.* a-year to the revenue; and which was now laid before Parliament on the motion of Sir George Clerk. In consequence I addressed a letter to the daily papers, in which I expressed myself as follows:—

“I have no hesitation in stating that the return, whether considered in regard to its general results or to the division of revenue under the two heads, is utterly fallacious.”

I concluded by promising to give in due time a full exposure of the fallacy—a promise afterwards fulfilled.*

In the short period during which it was under my consideration, an incident occurred which must be mentioned, because, besides giving additional evidence of Post Office incompetency, it excited some surprise and not a little amusement. The Overland Route to India being now established, a notice was issued by the Post Office, that persons wishing to send letters by that route to Australia must address them to “an agent in India,” who in turn must pay the postage onward, as otherwise the letters would not be forwarded. To the unreasonableness of expecting that every one writing by that route to Australia should

* ‘Report of Select Committee on Postage’ (1843) p. 43.

have an agent planted halfway, was added such vagueness of expression as would have rendered the injunction very misleading; "India" being put for "Bombay," where alone, according to Post Office arrangement, the postage could be paid. The absurdity of the proceeding was so manifest that within a week from its appearance the notice was withdrawn.

In this short period, also, Mr. Ashurst, acting for the Mercantile Committee, issued a circular to mayors of towns and other representative persons, recommending that petitions should be sent up praying for the complete execution of my plan; the recommendation being accompanied with a statement showing, in the most pithy manner, the chief estimates as to number of letters and average of postage under the old rates, made severally by the Post Office authorities, the Parliamentary Committee, and myself, previously to the adoption of the plan, and comparing them with actual results.

About this time Mr. Baring had moved for a return, to show how far the instructions, issued by the Treasury more than a year and a-half ago,* for the extension of rural distribution, had been carried into effect by the Post Office. Of course he had, ere this, learnt from me that its operation had been suspended by the Treasury; but now, in the return called for, this essential fact was suppressed, the whole answer being as follows:—

No definite arrangements have yet been made by the Post Office in conformity with the Minutes of the Lords of the Treasury, dated the 13th and 27th days of August, 1841, relating to the Post Office distribution in the rural districts of the United Kingdom.

W. L. MABERLY.

General Post Office, 8th April, 1843.

* See *ante*, pp. 286, 305.

The motion, so important to me, and, as I thought, and still think, to the cause of postal reform, seemed in danger of lapsing to the end of the session, not coming on until June 27th. The House was far from full, but the number present was considerable. I obtained a seat for myself and my brother Arthur under the gallery, sitting on the opposition side of the House, that I might the more readily supply my friends with any information that might be required during the progress of the debate. Colonel Maberly, likewise under the gallery, was, I suppose for the like reason, on the Government side of the House. Mr. Hawes was the organ of communication with myself; but who played the corresponding part on the other side I do not now remember. The debate occupies forty-seven pages in 'Hansard';* but of course, keen as was the interest with which my brother and I listened to every word, I shall not trouble the reader of the present day with more than a brief abstract.

The motion of which Sir Thomas Wilde had given notice was for a Select Committee, "To inquire into the progress which had been made in carrying into effect the recommendations of Mr. Rowland Hill for Post Office improvement; and whether the further carrying into effect of such recommendations or any of them, will be beneficial to the country."†

Sir Thomas Wilde, after adverting to the deliberate adoption of my plan by Parliament, and this in a time of commercial depression, with the knowledge that its adoption was expected to produce a small permanent and a large immediate reduction of revenue, pointed out that my plan had been presented as a whole, no part being recommended unless accompanied with the rest. After referring to the authoritative condemnation of the old system, to my appointment, to the acknowledged value of my

* Vol. lxx. pp. 399-445.

† p. 420.

services, to the opposition of the Post Office, to the hopelessness of expecting the completion of my plan from that department, or even from the Treasury, unless aided by one able and ready to deal with the fallacies with which resistance was defended; after having pointed out the unfairness of the experiment on which my plan had been judged, and, in fine, given a history of the progress (and non-progress) of postal reform during the time I was at the Treasury, and of my dismissal therefrom, he concluded a long and able speech by moving the resolution of which he had given notice.*

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, while repeating some of the allegations made in his letter to me, endeavoured to inculcate the late Government, and to throw upon them the responsibility of my dismissal, condemned my divulging the correspondence as a breach of confidence, greatly overstated the power committed to me during his tenure of office, spoke of much having been accomplished since I left the Treasury, enumerating for this purpose some measures adopted on my recommendation while I was still there, and others hastily resolved on since the presentation of my petition, no one of which, however, was yet carried into execution.

He attempted to defend the opposition to the reduction of the registration-fee by greatly overstating the amount of money-order business, extolled Lord Lowther, absurdly attributing to him the origination of penny postage, though he had voted against it in committee;† asserted that the Post Office did not pay its own expenses;‡ but ended by

* ‘Hansard,’ vol. lxx. pp. 399, 400.

† The sole ground of this statement was that Lord Lowther had recommended a penny rate for *Prices Current*.

‡ This assertion was obviously made in reliance on the “Fallacious Return.” So gross an error in a finance minister showed an ignorance hardly credible.

saying that he had no objection to a limited inquiry, and by proposing, as an amendment to Sir Thomas Wilde's motion, the following :—

‘That a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the measures adopted for the general introduction of the system of penny postage, and for the facilitating the conveyance of letters throughout the country.’*

Mr. F. Baring (late Chancellor of the Exchequer) saw no objection to the amendment, and hoped that Sir Thomas Wilde would allow it to be carried in lieu of his own motion.

He touched upon the unfair use made of the term “penny postage,” a term by no means including the whole plan, for the purpose of limiting my engagement; and remarked that in renewing this engagement for one year he had not meant to restrict it to that period, but had merely refrained from acting discourteously towards his successor, while “all along of opinion that the services of Mr. Hill at the Treasury would be required for a much longer period than one year.”†

He continued as follows (and I hope that I may be pardoned for making the quotation) :—

‘He also thought it was only common justice to say that, at the period when it was determined to carry out this plan, he had not the slightest personal knowledge of Mr. Rowland Hill. * * * He had expected that a person who had been long engaged in the preparation of an extensive system of this kind would not carry out the change with that coolness and judgment that was requisite; and he had expected that he should have great difficulties to contend with in inducing Mr. Hill to adopt any alteration in his plan that might appear requisite. He found quite the contrary of this, and that Mr. Hill, with the greatest readiness, adopted any suggestions that were made to him; so that instead of difficulties, he found every facility in carrying the plan into

* ‘Hansard,’ vol. lxx. pp. 420-434.

† p. 435.

effect. True, Mr. Hill gave his reasons for the opinion that he had adopted, or for the course that he recommended; but if any of his suggestions were not adopted, he always found Mr. Hill most ready to give way to the course which he suggested.*

He admitted that—

‘No absolute bargain had been broken with Mr. Rowland Hill, still he could not help expressing his sincere regret, that after three years’ exertions, which were characterized by the utmost zeal and intelligence, he should be allowed to retire from the public service in the way in which he had. He repeated that, although no bargain had been broken, still if zeal, intelligence, and ability, and the rendering important public services, entitled any one to claim consideration, Mr. Hill had a most powerful case.†

Towards the close of his speech he dealt as follows with Mr. Goulburn’s statement as to the extent of the money-order operations:—

‘The calculation which the right hon. gentleman had made, as to the amount of money transmitted through the Money-Order Office, was a most extraordinary one. The right hon. gentleman stated the amount to be eight millions, whereas he should have said four millions; the right hon. gentleman had made the slight mistake of doubling the amount by calculating the money which was paid in, and adding to it the same money when paid out. According to the right hon. gentleman’s mode of calculating, to arrive at the quantity of water which passes through a pipe, you must add the water which enters at one end to the same water when it passes out at the other end, and the quantity so added together will give the result desired.‡

He rejoiced that a Committee was to be appointed, and he observed, in conclusion:—

‘That if ever there was a measure in reference to which the people had a right to ascertain whether it was carried into effect fully and fairly, it was this.§

* ‘Hansard,’ vol. lxx. p. 435. † p. 435, 436. ‡ p. 437. § p. 438.

Mr. Wallace very briefly supported the motion, at the same time speaking highly of Lord Lowther, but giving it as his opinion that the duties of Postmaster-General "could only be performed with thorough efficiency by a Commission."*

Sir Robert Peel—

‘Had never felt a doubt as to the great social advantages of lowering the duty on letters; the only doubt was as to its financial effect: in all other respects the result of any inquiry would show that, whatever might have been the loss to the revenue, much advantage had been derived in what concerned the encouragement of industry, and the promotion of communication between the humbler classes of the community.’

After observing that "it was, therefore, no dissatisfaction with Mr. Hill's conduct, no indifference to his services, that led him and his right hon. friend to take the course they had taken,"† he said, in reference to my original appointment—

‘It appeared to him, that, had it been deemed necessary to retain Mr. Hill's services, and had it been conceived that the Post Office authorities were hostile to the plan, prejudiced against its principle and its details, and indisposed to lend themselves with zeal and cordiality to carrying it out, the plan should have been, not to retain Mr. Hill in control over the Post Office (yet unconnected with it), but to have at once made him Secretary of the Post Office. That department would thus have been no longer in a position continually to obstruct, as the complaint was, the due execution of the plan; but Mr. Hill himself, the person so deeply anxious for the success of the scheme, would have the immediate control of it.‡’

He also spoke of Colonel Maberly in terms of general esteem, and denied that he had failed in cordial co-operation with me, speaking likewise in high terms of Lord Lowther, and maintaining (contrary

* ‘Hansard,’ vol. lxx. p. 438.

† p. 439.

‡ pp. 439, 440.

to fact) that he had voted in committee for all Mr. Warburton's resolutions,* and was a decided friend to Mr. Hill's system.†

He acquiesced in the appointment of a Committee, and "would assure them (the House) that, while he continued in office, he would lend all his weight, influence, and authority to insure full justice to the new system."‡

After some remarks from Mr. Milner Gibson, Sir George Clerk, Mr. Aglionby, and Mr. Hume, Sir Thomas Wilde declared himself satisfied with the amendment, which was agreed to without a division.§

The indirect effect of the modification demanded by Ministers in Sir Thomas Wilde's motion was to take the nomination of the Committee out of the hands of the mover, and to give it to Government—the natural consequence being that the majority was made to consist of Government supporters. Of the thirteen gentlemen selected, six only were of the Liberal party; amongst these, however, were some of my best friends. Of course, in securing a majority, Government also obtained the appointment of the Chairman, and the choice fell upon Sir George Clerk. Upon this choice no further comment can be required than a simple statement of the position. I had appealed against a decision of the Treasury, a Court was constituted to try the case, and of this Court the Secretary of the Treasury was President. Lord Brougham used to tell of an amusing occurrence, I think at York, at the time when, as Mr. Brougham, he was on the Northern Circuit. When the list of the jury was calling over, preparatory to trying a certain case, the judge, remarking identity of name

* Lord Lowther voted for a uniform rate, but against any reduction below twopence.

† 'Hansard,' vol. lxx. pp. 440, 441.

‡ p. 442.

§ p. 445.

between one of the jurors and the plaintiff in the suit, and inquiring, "I suppose, Mr. Thomson, you are no relation to the plaintiff in this cause?" was answered, "Please you, my Lord, I *is* the plaintiff." The interloper was of course discharged; the parallel would have been more complete had he been retained, and made, at least, foreman of the jury. However, to have obtained a Committee at all was a very great gain; for though the bias to be naturally expected from its composition did not fail to show itself in the course of the proceedings, still opportunity was thus given for that full and plain statement of facts which, I felt sure, would suffice to set me right with the public; and, in justice to the Committee generally, I must say that my opportunity for making such statements was fairly given. I had, indeed, some brow-beating to endure (even beyond what appears in the Report), but with this the committee generally did not appear to sympathize; indeed, I have reason to believe that it tended rather to injure than to benefit the cause which it was meant to advance.

CHAPTER XII.

COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY. (1843.)

As the Committee was not moved for until so late in the session, it could not have very long to sit; and, at the end of seven weeks, its inquiry was brought to a close by the approach of the prorogation. This abrupt ending was in two ways unfortunate. In the first place, it cut short the evidence I was giving in a reply to allegations from the Post Office; and, in the second place, it allowed no time for more than the briefest Report.

To supply these deficiencies, and to present the whole in readable shape to the public, I drew up a careful statement of the principal facts given in evidence, with my own comments thereon, and published it under the title of 'State and Prospects of Penny Postage;'* and from this I proceed to abstract or extract, as may appear most convenient.

The pamphlet, I may add, contained, in an appendix, the whole of the correspondence asked for by Sir Thomas Wilde; including, therefore, the letters refused by the Treasury, but which I had afterwards laid before the Committee in the course of my evidence.

The witnesses before the Committee were—first, myself, and afterwards the Secretary of the Post

* London: Charles Knight and Co., Ludgate Street, 1844.

Office, the Postmaster-General, and three other functionaries of the department.

‘The main part of my evidence consisted of written statements, prepared from day to day, and read before the Committee. The Committee proposed this unusual course, and though I saw that it would greatly increase the labour of preparation, yet, as it enabled me to adopt a better arrangement of matter than could have been secured in an examination altogether *vivâ voce*, I readily complied with their desire.’*

The labour, however, was enormous; especially, of course, in the collection, verification, and arrangement of a vast number of facts, and required for its efficiency all practicable assistance from my family.

I believe nothing but such assistance, and the excitement of the contest, could have enabled me to support the toil. The amount of matter laid before the Committee may be judged of when I say that my examination-in-chief occupies a hundred and thirty-four pages in the folio Blue Book (equal to two volumes of an ordinary novel), and engaged the whole time of the Committee at six consecutive sittings. The heaviest part of the work was in the beginning, as then my time for preparation was briefest, and, as it fell out, the mass of matter largest—ninety-five of the hundred and thirty-four pages being taken up with the proceedings of the first four days.

After having restated the principal features of my plan, enumerated the chief improvements already effected, and glanced at the chief causes then impairing or retarding the beneficial operation of these improvements, I repeated the statement of their results, as already mentioned in my petition; adding that the chargeable letters had increased to nearly

* ‘State and Prospects,’ p. 3.

threefold ; while the increase in Post Office expenses, though still, in my opinion, excessive, was, when the accounts were cleared of certain extraneous charges, actually less for the three years subsequent to the reduction of the rate than for the three years previous thereto.*

I then gave some account of the social and commercial advantages already derived from the establishment of the penny rate, dwelling particularly on its benefit to the poor, and reading, as a specimen of letters received on the subject, the following from the Rev. Professor Henslow :—

Hitcham, Hadleigh, Suffolk, 16th April, 1843.

DEAR SIR,

* * * To the importance of the penny postage to those who cultivate science I can bear most unequivocal testimony, as I am continually receiving and transmitting a variety of specimens, living and dead, by post. Among them, you will laugh to hear that I have received three living carnivorous slugs, which arrived safe in a pill-box. This very day I have received from a stranger (by post) a parcel of young wheat-plants attacked by the larvæ of some fly ; and these having arrived in a living state, I can as readily hand them over to an entomologist for his inspection and remarks. That the penny postage is an important addition to the comforts of the poor labourer, I can also testify. From my residence in a neighbourhood where scarcely any labourer can read, much less write, I am often employed by them as an amanuensis, and have frequently heard them express their satisfaction at the facility they enjoy of now corresponding with distant relatives. As the rising generation are learning to write, a most material addition to the circulation of letters may be expected from among this class of the population ; indeed, I know that the pens of some of my village-school children are already put into requisition by their parents. A somewhat improved arrangement in the transmission of letters to our villages, and which might easily be accomplished, would greatly accelerate the

* ‘ Report of the Committee of 1843 on Postage,’ question 24.

development of country letter-writers. Of the vast domestic comfort which the penny postage has added to homes like my own, situate in retired villages, I need say nothing.

I remain, dear Sir, yours very faithfully,

J. S. HENSLOW.

I also referred to a letter from Messrs. Pickford, by which it appeared that they estimated the increase in the number of their letters during the last four years, enclosures being counted in, as from 30,000 to about 720,000.*

I likewise put in the letter, already referred to, from the secretary of the Parker Society, and announced my perfect readiness to produce *vivâ voce* testimony of disinterested persons to the same effect; but this was declined by the Committee as unnecessary.

I next compared the results of penny postage, and of the other alterations consequent upon it (so far as they had then been carried into effect), with the recorded anticipations of the Post Office and of myself; referring particularly † to illicit conveyance, the safety of postage-stamps, and the exchange of charge by number of enclosures for charge by weight; on all which points the expectations of the Post Office had proved erroneous. I also recalled Colonel Maberly's opinion that in the first year the number of letters would not double, even if every one were allowed to frank; Mr. Louis's estimate that the adoption of the penny rate would cause a loss of from sevenpence to eightpence per letter—that is, somewhat more than the gross revenue of the Post Office at the time; and Lord Lichfield's statement in Parliament, that each letter costs the Post Office “within the smallest fraction of twopence-halfpenny”—a calculation making the expense double the produce

* ‘Report of Committee of 1843,’ question 25.

† Question 72.

of the penny rate.* On the other hand, I had no difficulty in showing that my calculations had been justified, and my expectations, with due allowance for time and circumstance, fairly fulfilled.

I afterwards laid before the Committee a general statement of measures of improvement not yet effected, but which I had recommended while at the Treasury, several of them essential parts of my original plan.†

In addition to these, I mentioned various other measures, suggested by experience, which I had been quite unable to bring forward for want of opportunity.

I may so far anticipate as to say that nearly all the measures then spoken of under both categories were, after my return to office, carried successively into effect, and that their combined operation is the main cause of the present large amount of public convenience and fiscal benefit derived from the Post Office.

After such an enumeration of measures, it was almost superfluous to repeat that “the adoption of my plan was extremely incomplete, its financial operations most injuriously interfered with, and its public benefits lamentably cramped.”

I next proceeded to examine the parliamentary return, already referred to, more than once, as the “Fallacious Return;” by which, as will be remembered, it was made to appear that the Post Office, instead of affording, as shown by the ordinary accounts, a net revenue of 600,000*l.*, caused a positive loss.

It may well seem incredible that returns emanating from the same department should exhibit results so widely different, and the reader may naturally be

* ‘Report of Committee of 1843,’ question 72, p. 21.

† Questions 78—82.

curious as to the means by which the difference was produced. It was mainly this: At the time when penny postage was established, the packet service was, with little exception, charged to the Admiralty; whereas in this return the whole amount (612,850*l.*) was charged against the Post Office.* The department on which the expense ought to fall, or the equitable division of the charge between the two, might be matter of question; but it is obvious that to make such a change without notification, and thereby exhibit, by a mere shuffling of items, results so impaired, was to lead the public into a very false inference as to the revenue arising from the Post Office under the new system as compared with the old. Indeed, the delusion so produced not only misled large numbers at the time, but, as already said, haunts some minds even to the present day.

This, however, was not all; since the return also made a pretended division of the postage revenue under two heads, one consisting of the inland revenue, the other including the foreign and colonial revenue—a distinction which I showed to be made, not by actual examination of facts and just inference therefrom, but by mere estimate.

I also showed that in this return the amount of foreign and colonial postage was greatly swollen at the expense of the inland revenue, the purpose obviously being to disparage the results of penny postage; and further that, despite the statements of Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Goulburn, the net revenue of the department was really 600,000*l.* per annum,† a statement soon confirmed by the following admission of Colonel Maberly:—

‘As I have stated over and over again, looking at it as regards the Post Office revenue now, as compared with what

* ‘Report of Committee of 1843,’ question 85, p. 44.

† Questions 84 and 85.

the Post Office revenue was before the penny post, the surplus of income over expenditure is somewhere about 600,000*l*.*

It is remarkable that, after all these admissions, Lord Lowther should have said in evidence, "It is a return in which I still have confidence"—"I think it is a fair return;"† the more remarkable because no witness from the Post Office would vouch for the correctness of some of its most important details, and because two test returns called for by the Committee differed so widely, that one in effect placed the total postage between this country and France as low as 39,000*l*. per annum, while the other raised it to 71,000*l*.

After disposing of the "fallacious return"—fallacious to the extent of 600,000*l*. per annum—I proceeded to the proof of the different allegations of my petition.

Thus, under the head of 'Economy,' I referred to the case of the Dublin packets, the Channel Islands packets, and the duplicate train on the Birmingham and Gloucester line, with all of which the reader is already acquainted. As regards the Dublin packets, the Post Office authorities in their evidence did not even attempt to invalidate my statements; and even additional facts came to light, showing that on the only point of difficulty I was fully, though incidentally, supported by Mr. Walker, the eminent engineer, and even by the authority of the Post Office itself; while, nevertheless, though the advantage to the revenue, to be derived directly or indirectly from the change, amounted in all to about 50,000*l*. per annum, no steps had as yet been taken to carry it into effect. As regards the Channel Islands packets, though my report was commented on, and I was erroneously charged with overestimating the saving

* 'Report of Committee of 1843,' question 1664.

† Question 3042.

to be effected, the substance of my statements remained quite unquestioned, nay, had been fully confirmed by the Treasury, in a minute drawn subsequently to my departure, and communicated to the Post Office, while nevertheless the old plan, wasteful and inconvenient as it was, still continued in operation. As regards the duplicate train, Colonel Maberly, when called on to answer my statements, merely attempted to depreciate the saving, and repeated the objections formerly urged by the Post Office, without seeking to demonstrate the inapplicability or insufficiency of the plan I had devised and fully described for obviating these same objections; his only remark thereon being, "My opinion is that Mr. Hill is entirely ignorant of the circulation."*

I referred also to the case in which I had found the Post Office so heedlessly allowing three companies to make overcharge in respect of length of line; mistakes first denied, then reluctantly acknowledged, and at last but imperfectly corrected. The Committee, with a view of ascertaining the facts of the case, ordered a return from the Post Office;† but when this return came, it was erroneous in almost every particular. In my pamphlet I showed this in some detail,‡ but I will here mention only one amusing point—viz., that whereas the return gives the *annual* rate of excessive charge on the Leeds and Selby Railway at 88*l.* 14*s.* 7¼*d.*, and reports the period during which this charge continued as extending from 9th of November, 1840, to 5th of December, 1841, or nearly a year and a month, it gives the *total* overcharge at 81*l.* 2*s.* 7*d.*; thus demonstrating, by a kind of inverse proportion peculiar to itself, that, the rate of charge being given, there is a decrease in amount corresponding with an increase in time.

* 'Report of the Committee of 1843,' question 1573

† Appendix to Report, p. 258.

‡ 'State and Prospects,' p. 19.

I produced other Post Office misstatements, and pointed out that these, as well as those previously mentioned in relation to excessive railway payments, passed quite undetected by the Treasury.*

I also referred to my discovery relative to the occupation of excessive space in railway-carriages, the steps I took in consequence, and my conjectural estimate as to the large amount of waste arising from negligence on this point.

In the evidence in defence,† the only point really controverted was the inference to be drawn from the facts of the case. Colonel Maberly, indeed, treated the error as trifling and venial, and endeavoured to explain the ignorance of the Post Office by various circumstances; and somewhat ostentatiously displayed the promptitude of the correction on discovery, wondering at the same time whence Mr. Hill derived his exact information on the subject. On this point it sufficed to say that the documents which exhibited the blunder were furnished to the Treasury in the regular course of business by the Post Office functionaries, whose ignorance on the subject, therefore, if real, as Colonel Maberly stated that it was, must have arisen from their not having read or not having understood their own papers.

I could not but add that such waste of money was the more lamentable, since important improvements were at that very time withheld on the ground that the Post Office was unable to bear their expense.

I described a serious error lately made in a treaty with France, an error the more vexatious as being the result of needless meddling.

Extract from my evidence:—

‘The next and last case under this head [Economy] is the

* ‘Report of Committee of 1843,’ Minute, Appendix, p. 86.

† Report, questions 1550—1566.

new postal treaty with France, which, however excellent in its general objects and effects, is, in consequence of important errors in the details, operating very unfavourably on our portion of the revenue derived from the united postage, French and English, on letters between the two countries. Our scale of postage, as the Committee will bear in mind, ascends by half-ounces up to one ounce, and then by ounces. The French scale, on the other hand, ascends by quarter-ounces. Several important results flow from this distinction. As every letter, in regard to a portion of its postage, is under the quarter-ounce scale, the great majority of letters will be just within the quarter-ounce; such letters, therefore, though liable to a French rate of 20*d.* per ounce, and a British rate of only 10*d.* per ounce, would be charged 10*d.* each, viz., 5*d.* British and 5*d.* French—the whole being collected sometimes by the one Post Office, sometimes by the other. Under the old system each Government would retain its own 5*d.*, and hand over the second 5*d.* to the other Government. The English Post Office, however, in order to relieve itself of the trouble of accounting for the letters *numeratim*, proposed a clause by which each Government would have accounted to the other for the whole mail at once, according to its weight in bulk. I pointed out to the Treasury how unfairly towards our own Government the proposed stipulation would operate, and the proposal of the Post Office was consequently rejected. It appears, however, by the treaty, that it was subsequently revived, with a slight modification, which no doubt was thought would obviate the evil, but which only slightly mitigates it. Under the treaty, we are to pay in respect of a mail, the postage of which is collected in England, 20*d.* an ounce to the French for their share of the postage; whereas on a mail the postage of which is to be collected in France, we are only to receive 12*d.* per ounce. Applying this rule to the great majority, which, as before said, are just under the quarter-ounce, the ultimate effect is, that of our 5*d.*, when the postage is collected in France, the French hand over to us only 3*d.*, retaining 2*d.* of our 5*d.*, in addition to their own 5*d.*; whereas, when we collect the postage, we hand over to the French the whole of their 5*d.*, retaining our own 5*d.* without any addition. Upon certain small classes of letters the arrangement would be in favour of the English, but to a very slight extent even upon such classes; and, on the general

balance the disadvantage is to an annual amount probably of some thousands of pounds.*

Upon the importance of additional facilities there was the less need that I should repeat in my pamphlet what I had advanced before the Committee, because of the ample recognition given to such importance, in general terms, by Colonel Maberly, in his evidence:—

‘The Post Office has always held the opinion, and I believe they are right, that facilities judiciously applied will enormously increase the correspondence; and I have sometimes myself pushed this doctrine to a length that may be considered almost absurd, that facilities increase correspondence almost more than reduction of the rate.†

On the question, however, of what had been done towards that increase of facilities recognised as so important, I dealt with one or two of the most prominent points. Thus, under the head ‘Security of Correspondence,’ I referred to my evidence on the subject of registration; feeling it the more necessary to enlarge upon this point because of the exaggerated views put forth in his evidence by Colonel Maberly as to the insecurity then existing—views expressed in such phrases as “The department has become thoroughly demoralized;”‡ there has been “enormous plunder and robbery;”§ “the plunder is terrific;”|| and, by way of climax, “a letter posted with money in it might as well be thrown down in the street as put into the Post Office.”¶

After I had explained to the Committee the proceedings relative to registration during my last year at the Treasury, and exposed the fallacy relative to difficulties and delay at the forward offices,** and the

* ‘Report of Committee on Postage (1843),’ question 318.

† Question 1132.

‡ Question 1174.

§ Question 1163.

|| Question 1176.

¶ Question 1178.

** ‘Report of Committee of 1843,’ questions 1115–17, 2334, 2443–55, and 2783.

yet more insuperable difficulties to be encountered in the travelling-office—where “how the duty is to be performed” the Postmaster-General had declared himself “altogether at a loss to imagine,” adding that “if the number of registered letters should increase largely this office must be abolished”—a return was ordered by the Committee, in which, when received, the danger to the public service certainly stood forth in a striking light; since it appeared that the number of registered letters then to be dealt with in the travelling-office, during its whole journey from London to Preston, averaged as high as six each trip!

Here it may be well to mention that several years afterwards, when at the Post Office, I was able to effect reductions in the registration-fee, first to 6*d.*, and eventually to its present rate of 4*d.*; this latter reduction being accompanied with a measure for the compulsory registration, with a double fee (charged upon delivery) on letters containing coin and posted unregistered.

For the purpose of refuting my statement, that little or nothing had yet been done in the way of increased facilities to the public, an attempt was made to extort from me an admission that there had been a great number of additional deliveries within the previous twelve months in different parts of the kingdom. The mode taken was to inquire if I were aware of large augmentations in particular towns selected by the querist (Mr. Escott), who said that he spoke from his own knowledge, and to lead the Committee to infer, from my inability to reply offhand to such questions, that I must be ignorant on the general subject; the whole was made up of parts, and if I could not speak to these, how could I be informed as to that? * In the interval, however, between

* ‘Report of Committee of 1843,’ questions 407-421, 581-594.

my two interrogations on this subject, I produced evidence flatly contradicting, so far as related to two out of the three towns named, the allegations so distinctly implied in the questions of the Hon. Member.*

On the subject of rural distribution, also, I laid before the Committee the facts already known to the reader, together with a copy of Mr. Baring's minute authorising an important extension.

In the debate on the appointment of the Committee, Mr. Goulburn intimated that Mr. Baring's plan had been rejected as expensive, and in the evidence from the Post Office a futile attempt was made to establish this position, the terms of the calculation being so shuffled with as to make it appear that the expense would be more than double its true amount. The Post Office consequently had by its own admission effected nothing,† but being startled by the parliamentary agitation, and yet unwilling to adopt a plan which it had condemned, had on May 31st of this year hastily propounded a scheme of its own,‡ in which a rule was laid down, without any estimate or any possibility of estimate as to the extent of its operation, and in acknowledged ignorance of the expense involved; an ignorance which was further shown before the Committee by the conflicting opinions of the Postmaster-General and his secretary — the former estimating the expense of the extension at 7000*l.* or 8000*l.* per annum,§ and the latter, in effect, raising it to at least 80,000*l.* or 90,000*l.*|| According to this higher estimate, which however was, I felt sure, still far below the mark, Mr. Baring's plan, rejected on the score of expense,

* 'Report of Committee of 1843,' Questions 563–570.

† Question 1052.

§ Question 2934.

‡ Appendix to the Report, p. 146.

|| Questions 877 and 1084.

was replaced by another at least ten times as expensive.*

Such are a few of the cases selected for my pamphlet, out of the many dealt with in my evidence relative to past proceedings.

The next point of consideration was the probability of the completion of my plan. I again quote from my pamphlet, premising that in the previous passage I had referred to the importance which I had always attached to the plan as a whole, and to the Duke of Wellington's emphatic recognition of such importance :—

‘As regards probabilities, it is a curious fact that, from the institution of the Post Office to the present time, no important improvement has had its origin in that establishment. The town-posts originated with a Mr. Dockwra, shortly before the Restoration; the cross-posts with Mr. Allen, about the middle of last century; and the substitution of mail-coaches for horse and foot posts was, as is well known, the work of Mr. Palmer some thirty years later. It is remarkable that the cases of Dockwra and Palmer bear a considerable resemblance to my own. The opposition to the introduction, and, what is more extraordinary, to the working-out and even the continuance of Palmer's plan, is too well known to be dwelt on here; but both these remarkable men saw their plans adopted, were themselves engaged to work them out, and subsequently, on the complaint of the Post Office, were turned adrift by the Treasury.†

I may remark here, that though the three reformers—Dockwra, Palmer, and I—were all alike in the fact of dismissal, a subsequent distinction must be observed. Mr. Dockwra, I fear, never received any recompense for his valuable improvement; Mr. Palmer was allowed a pension of 3,000*l.* per annum, an amount much below that promised him in the case of success—obtaining

* ‘State and Prospects of Penny Postage,’ pp. 33--35. † Pp. 35, 36.

however, after many years delay, a parliamentary grant of 50,000*l.*; I alone was so far favoured as to be recalled to aid in the completion of my plan.

In dealing with this question of probabilities, I was obliged to dwell strongly on the notorious hostility of the Post Office, as well as its incapacity for the task to be performed: to refer, for instance, to Colonel Maberly's habitual prediction of failure,* and Lord Lowther's declared inability to see anything in my plan save the introduction of a penny rate and the establishment of a third delivery to Hampstead.† I had also to show, from the past inaction and indifference of the Treasury and of the whole administration of the day, the hopelessness of looking for efficient aid in that quarter.

Before concluding the account of my evidence, I extract a passage, which may perhaps afford some little amusement.

The reader will recollect the circumstances already mentioned relative to a notice issued by the Post Office, recommending persons corresponding with the far East by the Overland Mail to appoint agents in India for the payment of the onward postage.‡ On this subject the following passages occurred before the Committee:—

‘*Chairman.*—With regard to Indian letters, an objection was taken by the East India Company to forwarding letters from Bombay unless payment was made at Bombay?—I am aware of that.

‘That was notified to the Post Office by the East India Company?—Unquestionably.

‘The Post Office gave notice to the public of such detention on the part of the East India Company?—Yes.

‘Did they do anything more than that?—Yes; they advised that every one wishing to write to places beyond

* ‘Report of 1843,’ questions 1803 and 1804.

† Question 2968.

* Vide *ante*, p. 343.

Bombay should appoint an agent for the payment of the transit postage.

‘The Post Office advised that?—Yes.

‘Where does such advice appear?—In the notice given by the Post Office on the occasion.

* * * * *

‘Does that contain anything more than an announcement to the public that the East India Company had made such a regulation?—Yes; it contains a recommendation to the public to address their letters to the care of correspondents in India.

* * * * *

‘*Mr. Tennent.*—The tenor of your former answer would import that that was a suggestion emanating from the Post Office; are you aware that that was a recommendation made to the public by the Post Office, in pursuance of direct instructions from the Directors of the East India Company?—I was not aware till this moment that the Directors of the East India Company had power to issue instructions to the Postmaster-General.

* * * * *

‘Are you aware of any instruction given by the East India Directors to the Post Office, that if parties wished their letters to be forwarded, they must find an agent there to do it?—I have, of course, no means of knowing the correspondence between the Post Office and the East India Company.

* * * * *

But assuming that the facts are as I gather from the questions of the honourable gentleman, I do not see how those facts can place the Post Office under the necessity of calling upon the British public to do that which is quite impracticable.

* * * * *

‘*Chairman.*—What course has been taken?—The course which appears to have been taken is this, that the Post Office issued the notice I have read in the course of the last April, and that it was withdrawn almost immediately after, in consequence, as it appears to me, of the ridicule which the proceeding brought upon the Post Office.’*

The proceedings of the Committee, as I have

* ‘Report of Committee on Postage (1843),’ questions 423-439.

already stated, were brought to a rather abrupt conclusion, so as to prevent, for the moment, an elaborate Report; still the power to say enough to acquit both the Treasury and Post Office was obviously in the hands of the majority, had it felt warranted in such a course; or again, if the inquiry were judged incomplete, nothing could have been easier than to procure the reappointment of the Committee in the following session, and so to obtain abundant time for the formal acquittal of both departments in gross and in detail, together with an equally complete condemnation of myself. Neither course, however, was taken; the Committee merely reporting what it had done, regretting its inability, for want of time, to report its opinion, but giving the evidence and various correspondence, and entertaining no doubt that both the Treasury and the Post Office would give my proposals the fullest consideration.*

The reader must imagine for himself, if he can, the grounds on which the Committee had to rest when they expressed such confidence. All I need say here is, that I can point to but little in subsequent events to relieve his perplexity.

My pamphlet, after thus briefly setting forth my evidence-in-chief before the Parliamentary Committee, and the reply given to the counter-evidence, so far as time allowed, and supplementing this latter with remarks in its own pages, continued as follows:—

‘In conclusion, I must repeat that if in this pamphlet I have limited my attention to portions only of the late evidence, the selection is made merely for brevity. It would be impossible, without extending these remarks to a most tedious length, even to touch upon all the points in debate. There is not a single one, however, I most emphatically declare, from the discussion of which I have the least disposition to shrink; nor, I maintain, *a single material point on which my*

* ‘Report on Committee on Postage (1843),’ p. 3.

positions were shaken by the Post Office evidence—all apparent effect of the kind being referable to such misrepresentation, distortion, or suppression, however unwittingly employed, as has been exposed in these pages.

‘Under these circumstances, what remains for me to do? So long as there is no opportunity of advancing the public benefit, and so long as the absence of all power relieves me in justice from all responsibility, it is my earnest wish to retire from labours so heavy as those in which I have now for many years been engaged;—to avoid conflicts which, though I have not shrunk from them when necessary, have always been repugnant to my feelings and remote from my habits of life;—and, if possible, to recruit that health which both these causes have seriously impaired’*

The preparation of the pamphlet from which I have drawn the foregoing account could not, of course, begin until the appearance of the printed report of the Committee’s proceedings, which was not until more than three months after their close. The interim allowed me a period for needful rest, and was not quite without features of interest. I must first mention, however, that while the Committee was yet sitting, and indeed in the interval between my two examinations, I received a very pleasing testimonial from Cupar Fife, consisting of the entire works of Sir Walter Scott, including the Memoir by Lockhart, and occupying ninety-eight volumes, in each of which was inserted the following inscription:—

Presented to ROWLAND HILL, Esq., by a number of the inhabitants of Cupar Fife and its vicinity, in testimony of their gratitude for the valuable services rendered by him to his country, by his invention and successful introduction of the Uniform Penny Postage Scheme.

Although the present Testimonial is small, yet the Subscribers hope it may not be deemed inappropriate to offer, from their local circle, the works of one of the most

* ‘State and Prospects of Penny Postage,’ p. 42.

eminent of Scotland's authors—works which have conveyed instruction and amusement from the palace of the prince to the hearth of the humblest peasant—to an individual who has, by his single exertions, also done so much to promote the happiness and comfort of this nation, throughout all its classes, by facilitating its communications and intelligence, as well political and commercial as social and domestic.

Signed by appointment of the Subscribers,

ROBERT NICOLL, *Provost, Cupar Fife,*
Chairman.

WM. MITCHELL, *Secretary.*

On September 7th I received a letter from the Spanish Minister in London, requesting information desired by his Government, with a view to the introduction of the postage-stamp into Spain. Such information I was, of course, most happy to supply; the more so as I felt that the very use of the stamp must involve a certain amount of uniformity, and, as a consequence, tend to low rates—all subsequently verified.

Not long afterwards, the papers announced that the Russian Government also had adopted the stamp, though for a reason which the Englishman even of that time would hardly have imagined for himself, and which certainly I had not set forth among expected advantages. The motive in each case was understood to be the desire of preventing fraud in the postmasters; and it is obvious that much speculation, practicable under the system of money-payments, would be prevented by the use of stamps. It is remarkable, however, that the first countries to adopt the improvement should be two so far from taking a general lead in European civilization and liberality.

About the same time, I had some indirect evidence of the hold which the new system had now taken of the public mind at home. Mr. Warburton, having

become a candidate for the representation of Kendal, and finding his own strength and that of his opponent pretty nearly balanced, called upon me to take some step for showing my estimate at once of the part he had taken in the establishment of penny postage, and of the help expected from him in support of the remaining measures. Of course, I had only to express my real feelings, in the pithiest language at my command, in order to give the strongest attestation that he could desire. This I did in a letter to Mr. Charles Villiers, who was taking an active part in the election, and by whom the letter was no doubt published to the constituency. The value of the support thus given it would, of course, have been even then impracticable to ascertain, but I had the pleasure of learning that Mr. Warburton himself thought highly of it, and that, in short, he gained his election. I may add that this, the first application of the kind, was by no means the last.

On November 22nd the Committee's Report was issued, and without loss of time I fell to such perusal and annotation of the whole evidence as were necessary preliminaries to the writing of my pamphlet; and my brother Arthur's Christmas holidays fortunately beginning about the time that this preparation was completed, I was able to have his almost undivided help; so that before the end of January the work appeared—copies being immediately sent to the leading journals, to every member of the Postage Committee, to Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Goulburn, to various other influential persons, and to a large number of friends and supporters.

Amongst various letters of acknowledgement I received the following:—

From the Rev. Sydney Smith.

SIR,

Many thanks for your book, which I will diligently

read, as I know no one who has increased the public happiness and comfort more than yourself (I do not meddle with the question of revenue—that is a separate chapter); but it is impossible to speak too highly of the advantage and satisfaction your plan has afforded to the country at large; and though it may have diminished the revenue directly, I think it might easily be that facility of communication is a great source of wealth and revenue too.

February 22nd, 1844.

From Miss Martineau.

February 26th, 1844.

DEAR MR. HILL,

I write not to trouble you for an answer, about which I always feel most scrupulous, but to thank you for sending me your last statement. It is most painfully interesting; and it seems to be found so by others, for my copy has been passing from hand to hand, since the day after I had it. At first reading I was, I own, more discouraged than I ever felt before; but the more I consider, the more persuaded I am that all will yet end well. Of one thing I am now fully convinced—that there is *no* danger of any one supposing you responsible for “improvements” superficially resembling yours, but expensive and ill-managed. From all I can learn everywhere, it does seem clear that a broad distinct line is drawn between your propositions and those of the reckless * * * or any one else. I am always *at it* with my acquaintance in Parliament; and what I see there is the ground of my hope that you will get justice at last. I find them all, at first, prone to the very natural error of supposing the Post Office gentry good authority on Post Office matters. When they take my reference to the Report, and find what a figure these same gentry cut there, a great point is gained, from which surely justice must, sooner or later, ensue.

CHAPTER XIII.

RAILWAY DIRECTION. (1843 to 1846.)

IN THE MIDST of these transactions I found it necessary, as already intimated, to think of means for the maintenance of my family; my choice, however, was limited, for, as I never abandoned the hope of returning to my occupation under Government, I had to avoid any engagement which would render this impracticable or even difficult. I wished, likewise, to find some post in which my peculiar powers should find scope and utility, and which should, if possible, have some direct relation to that service which was uppermost in my thoughts—should, even by its nature, tend to give me increased fitness for those more immediate and more detailed duties which I hoped to be one day called on to perform.

It happened that at this time the affairs of the Brighton Railway Company were in an unsatisfactory state, so much so that it was held desirable to unseat the actual directors and appoint others in their place. In this project I was invited to take part, and being put in nomination for the new board, became, by the success of the movement, one of the directors.

The new Chairman was Mr. J. M. Parsons, and to him, more than to any other individual, are to be attributed the judicious and energetic measures taken, in the early stages, for the restoration of the

Company's affairs. He afterwards informed me that he viewed my appointment with considerable alarm, expecting that I should urge, if not a penny rate, at least some sweeping reduction of fares, to the ruin of the Company's finances. It will suffice to say that we became sincere, accordant, and earnest coadjutors, and formed a friendship which continued warm and unbroken to the day of his death.

The rigorous examination immediately set on foot showed the existence of practices now too well known in railway management, whereby the appearance of prosperity is maintained amidst progress towards real insolvency. Dividends had been made when there were in fact no profits to divide, and meantime the resources of the Company were being drained and narrowed, by waste, mismanagement, and inattention to public convenience. Distrust and dissatisfaction had gone so far that the value of the shares, originally 50*l.*, had fallen to 35*l.*

The directors soon saw that for the first half-year, at least, no dividend could justly be made; but, of course, were not without anxiety as to the result of such announcement on the price of shares. To our gratification, it was so well received by the public that the price almost immediately began to rise; and I may add that purchasers had no reason to regret their outlay.

After having continued some time in the direction, I had the satisfaction to find myself, on the motion of the late Mr. Pascoe Grenfell, M.P., unanimously appointed Chairman of the Company, and from this time I gave my undivided efforts to its affairs. Fully convinced of its great capabilities, and having great reliance in my coadjutors, and (if the truth must be told) in myself, I had invested in its shares all my own property, and a considerable sum of money borrowed from the various members of my family

and other friends, some of whom also became shareholders on their own account. In so doing, I did not look upon myself as rash, but as simply embarking the largest capital that I could command in a concern of whose soundness I was well assured, in which I was a leading partner, and from which, if expectations were not realized, I should have it in my power to withdraw with, at worst, but moderate loss.

While retrenching useless expenditure and providing for public convenience, the directors also turned much attention to the important point of security to the lives and limbs of passengers. On this point, as well as on some others, I had an opportunity for inspection, of which I made the most. Partly for economy, and partly for the benefit of my health, I had removed to Brighton ; and in my trips to town, made three or four times each week, I regularly took my seat in a *coupé* facing backwards at the extreme end of the train. By this means I could, at pleasure, take notice of proceedings and appearances along the line, and in particular mark how far the signals required after the passing of a train were duly made. The solicitor to the Company, who also resided at Brighton, soon became my frequent companion, and now and then the third place was occupied by one or other of the directors. This gave convenience for the transaction of business by the way, and enabled me to enter the board-room thoroughly prepared for rapid and decisive action.

There was one point of the trip at which, in the beginning, appearances were rather alarming. When the train stopped near the London terminus for the collection of tickets, the engine was transferred from front to rear ; and the sight of the moving mass advancing upon one's carriage, with apparently nothing but glass to ward off its shock, was a

little startling. Of course habit did its work, so that after a while the movement ceased to attract attention, though sensation was revived whenever we were joined by a newcomer. On one occasion happening to meet the late Lord Dalhousie (then President of the Board of Trade) on the platform, I invited him to take the third seat, the second being occupied by my friend Mr. Cobb, the banker of Banbury, who, on a recent occasion, reminded me of the occurrence, which, like many others, shows that a man of unquestionable and even lofty courage may be disconcerted by a novel appearance of danger. When Lord Dalhousie caught sight of the engine advancing upon us he showed serious alarm, until relieved by our reassurance.

I believe it was upon the Brighton line that systematic examination of officers previously to their admission to new duties was first established, and I took every means to make it as complete as possible.

Generally speaking I had the hearty co-operation of my brother directors, and doubtless many of the improvements effected during my connection with the Board originated with one or other of their number; but there was one important point on which it was with difficulty that I got my own way, and I advert to this particularly, because I am convinced by a variety of circumstances that laxity thereon is a frequent cause of accident, even to the present day. This was a strict enforcement of penalties—very moderate ones sufficed—on every discovered breach of rule. Of course there was ready concurrence in this whenever the omission resulted in positive accident, but there was no less disposition to condone at other times. “Why punish the poor man?—No harm has been done,” was a frequent remonstrance; and when I pointed out that the amount of blame was nowise affected by the result, my proposition,

though admitted in theory, was deemed harsh in practice ; so that, while no objection was raised to the soundness of the rule, almost every case seemed to be regarded as an exception. Fortunately, I had enough of support to maintain enforcement, and to this I attribute much of the benefit which followed.

Another useful practice was to diffuse throughout the Company's force full information as to the cause of accidents, wherever they might occur. For this purpose, we arranged with the proprietors of one of the railway journals, that whenever accounts of accidents were given in the paper we should be supplied with three or four hundred slip-copies of the narrative, and these were distributed to every station-master, engine-driver, guard, and pointsman — in short, to all on whose conduct the safety of the passengers depended.

Again, by occasionally travelling on the engine I discovered defects in the arrangements which might otherwise have been concealed till some catastrophe brought them to light. For instance, the road between London and Brighton at that time belonged to three several companies, each with a different code of signals, or rather, each, with certain exceptions, interpreting the same signals differently. Consequently, the engine-driver, in reading the signal, had to consider on what part of the road the train was then running. The danger of such a state of things was so obvious that I had no great difficulty in establishing a uniform code. I may remark here, that I know of few things more interesting or exciting than to travel on an engine running at high speed, especially on a dark night.

The success of all these precautionary measures was highly satisfactory. It must, indeed, be admitted that in some respects safety was easier of attainment then than now, lines being more simple and the

traffic much less. But, on the other hand, experience was then comparatively short, and much was unknown which is now familiar; neither was the electric telegraph yet in use. Be all this as it may, the fact is that during the three years and more that I sat at the Brighton board the Company was subjected to, I believe, but one external claim for compensation. This exceptional case was as follows. It is well known that when a train reaches a terminus it is the duty of a pointsman to direct it into some portion of a station then free to receive it. On one occasion the pointsman at Brighton erred in this important duty, so that the arriving train struck against a line of carriages, fortunately empty ones, then occupying the rails into which it ran. As the arriving train was of course preparing to stop, and had brought down its speed almost to a minimum, the collision was slight; and though the alarm was considerable, and several of the passengers were a little shaken, only one sustained any injury. This was a young woman who wore one of the large combs common at the period, and whose scalp was slightly wounded by its teeth. Of course the compensation was trifling. The delinquent pointsman, being brought before the Board, at once acknowledged his error, and declared his inability to account for the momentary misapprehension which produced it, but pleaded in excuse that though he had held his present post for several years, and had had on the average to perform the duty in question nearly a hundred times per day, this was his first mistake in its execution. This statement, which, so far as it could be tested, was found to be literally true, appeared so satisfactory to the Board, that, in their judgment, looking at his conduct as a whole, the man deserved praise rather than blame; though, in deference to public opinion, he was for a time removed to an inferior post.

Two improvements adopted by the Board, chiefly, I believe, on my recommendation, are now recognised as established institutions; and by their extension to other lines, and by increase in the scope of their operation, have attained an importance far beyond any expectation that I could then have formed. These are excursion-trains and express-trains.

Our first excursion-train ran on Sundays only, care being taken that it should not trench, either in going or returning, on the hours of divine service. After a time the train was run on Mondays also.

The earliest express-train, intended to accommodate residents in Brighton whose occupation was in London, started from the first at its present hour, though of necessity it occupied more time in the trip; no engine of the day being able to run fifty miles without replenishment, and no means having yet been devised for supplying water to an engine in motion. The train, however, travelled at the rate of thirty-four miles per hour, including a halt at Redhill, no small achievement at that time. Every one must have remarked how soon the gratification of one desire gives birth to another—how soon we complain of imperfection in what would have been regarded but a few years earlier as unattainable perfection. I happened one day, for what reason I forget, to travel in an ordinary carriage, and, not being known to its other occupants, heard some free remarks on the management of the line, to which I, of course, listened for my own edification. Somewhat to my disappointment, I found the late acceleration complained of as insufficient; one of the passengers exclaiming, “This is a slow coach!—a very slow coach!” Imprudently I asked, “Are you aware, sir, that the whole distance from London to Brighton is accomplished in an hour and a half?” “Oh!” was the glib reply, “if they can do it in an

hour and a half, they can just as well do it in an hour !”

By one expedient I sought to combine advantage to my present service with benefit to my former one. Perceiving that residence at Brighton, and therefore custom to the railway, would be increased by every addition to postal facilities between that town and the metropolis, I induced the directors to make an offer to the Post Office for the conveyance of a mail by every train without any additional expense to that department. The result of this offer, which was kept for some time under consideration at the Post Office, will presently appear.

In the course of 1845 the price of the 50*l.* share had risen, I think, to 75*l.*, or more than twice their market value at the time when the new directors were appointed ; a price, however, which I knew to be in excess of their real value.

I may observe here that, pecuniarily speaking, I had been a gainer by my expulsion from the Treasury ; the rise in the value of my railway property, resulting mainly from my own efforts and those of my brother directors, having been so great as to render my previous salary comparatively insignificant ; indeed, in one year, while chairman, my total gain was as high as 6000*l.* Why then did I resign so advantageous a position, especially as I could not but foresee a danger, a fear afterwards too well confirmed, that, in the absence of my own direct supervision and control, these great profits might be exchanged for yet greater losses ? The answer is to be found in the political circumstances of the day. By this time Sir Robert Peel's Government was beginning to totter, and the Liberals to have strong hopes of a speedy return to power. Believing that their return would be followed by my own recall, and feeling that my late efforts had drawn considerably on my

strength both of body and mind, I resolved to obtain a long holiday—an indulgence impracticable while I retained the chairmanship. I gave notice accordingly, as appears by the following extract from the ‘Railway Chronicle;’ which, perhaps, I may be pardoned for quoting, the more so as it announces the result of the offer to the Post Office already mentioned, and indicates probable consequences:—

‘The Post Office has accepted the liberal offer of the Brighton Company to carry a bag of letters by every train *gratis*. As the South-Eastern, following the Brighton’s good example, made a similar proffer, we presume that has been treated in like manner. We congratulate the Post Office on its wisdom, and we are apt to think that a large share of public thanks for the arrangement is due to the new Postmaster-General, the Earl of St. Germans. Coupled with this intelligence, so honourable to the Brighton Company, we regret to hear that the chief instigator of the proposition, the chairman, Mr. Rowland Hill, has intimated to the Board his intention to resign his post for the sake of his health, which has been much affected by his laborious attention to business.

‘Mr. Hill’s retirement will be felt by the Company and the public. Since he became chairman, the Brighton Railway has increased more than 50 per cent. in value, and the public accommodation on the line in all respects—cheapness, speed, punctuality, and a kind solicitude for the comfort of all passengers, from highest to lowest—may justly be said to have been raised quite to an equality with that of the best-managed line in the kingdom.’

Some months after the appearance of the paragraph quoted above, I received a gratifying application from the South-Western Railway Company. I must premise that my intercourse with this corporation had been hitherto mainly of a hostile character, its contests with the Brighton Company having been both numerous and fierce. I was now informed, however, that this Company intended to appoint a

manager at a high salary, then a rather novel measure, and I was requested to recommend a fit person for the duties. Upon my inquiring as to the precise amount of salary to be given, and the specific qualifications required, I was told that the former would be about 1,500*l.* per annum, and for the latter, said the respondent, "Let them be as much like your own as possible." The meaning of this could not be misunderstood, but of course, under the circumstances, could not be acted upon. Other eligible offers were made to me, but, with the Post Office in view, I could accept none.

I had now passed nearly four years in the position of railway director, and though it was grief and bitterness to me to be so long kept aloof from my true work; yet, considering the close connection between railway companies and the Post Office, and the consequent importance of the knowledge I had been enabled to gain, I could not regard the time as ill-spent.

Before leaving the subject of railways, however, I must mention one occurrence, typical, I believe, of many others, the whole forming one of the great causes of that unfortunate depreciation in railway property of which the world is now but too well aware.

At the time of my joining the Company the town of Hastings enjoyed no railway communication with any other place. Two projects were started for connecting it with London—one by the Brighton Company, and the other by the South-Eastern. In the parliamentary contest that ensued, the Brighton Company dwelt much on the importance of a coast-line, so useful in defence against invasion, of which at that time there was no small apprehension; and of the military advantage of such a line, strong evidence was given by the Duke of Wellington.

The South-Eastern Company, on the other hand, whose projected line was in effect of the same length, based its claim mainly on the fact that by taking the inland route it would open up a new tract of country of great agricultural importance. The Committee, naturally desirous of obtaining both advantages, suggested for the consideration of the Brighton Company whether it would not be worth while to construct its coast-line, even though the inland line should also be made. As, however, the Brighton directors distinctly rejected this proposal, on the ground that the traffic would not suffice for two lines, the Committee decided in favour of the coast-line; and the Brighton Company, regarding a decision made under circumstances so peculiar as a sufficient security against competition, put the works immediately in hand. In the next session, however, the South-Eastern Company returned to the charge with a slight modification of its route, made, apparently, to save appearances; but again, the modified project being referred to the Board of Trade, according to a rule recently laid down by the House of Commons, and being condemned by that authority, on the ground that the line was in effect the same with that lately rejected by Parliament, was abandoned by the Company. In the following session, however—as Parliament meantime had shown little disposition to treat the recommendations of the Board of Trade with respect—the project was again renewed; and when the Brighton directors attempted opposition, they were coolly informed by the chairman of the parliamentary committee that, owing to a change in the Standing Orders of the House, they had no *locus standi*. In fine, the South-Eastern Company gained its point. Railway companies have been denounced as ruining each other by competition; if so, where does a large portion of the blame lie?

CHAPTER XIV.

NATIONAL TESTIMONIAL. (1844-46.)

OF one motive to retirement from more active railway duties I have not yet spoken: it was supplied by the generosity of the public, as will appear hereafter. I first return to transactions connected with the Post Office, from which attention has been withdrawn by the above narrative. Of such limited progress, however, as was made towards the adoption of my plans, I shall speak more conveniently when the period of my exclusion approaches its close.

In May, 1844, there appeared a pamphlet entitled 'The Administration of the Post Office,' &c., which, though published anonymously, had evidently issued from the Post Office. I will not here report the strong terms in which I find it spoken of in my register of documents, though I see no ground whatever for retraction; but merely mention that afterwards I was in a position where, as I believed, I could easily have discovered the authorship of this and other similar matter; but, feeling that more harm than good would result from such discovery, I carefully abstained from investigation.

Somewhat before the appearance of this pamphlet, I received a letter from M. de St. Priest, a member of the French Chamber of Deputies, asking for information on the results of our postal reform, and sending the Report of a debate on a motion made by him,

to reduce the French inland rates to a maximum of six sous, with a postage of four sous for shorter distances—a motion opposed and defeated by the Ministry. In July of the same year, this gentleman came to England for the purpose of holding personal conference with me on the subject, which he was not in the least disposed to let drop. Three months later I received a pamphlet from M. Grasset, on the subject of M. de St. Priest's motion; and with the earnest author, as also with M. de St. Priest himself, and no less with M. Piron, who actually risked his position in the French Post Office by his efforts for reform, I had subsequently much correspondence.

In February, 1845, M. de St. Priest renewed his motion, which, however, was superseded by an amendment made by M. Tizeranne for establishing a uniform rate of four sous, which was carried by a majority of one; but, unfortunately, next day, upon the bill so amended being put to the vote, the ayes were but just equal to the noes—so that, according to a rule of the House, the bill was rejected.

A year later, viz., on March 7th, 1846, the motion was again renewed; but again, and this time through gross misrepresentation of the results in England, made by the Minister of Finance, M. Laplagne, it was again defeated; nor was any further attempt made in the French Chamber, so far at least as I am aware, during the reign of Louis Philippe.

About a month, however, after this defeat in France, I had the pleasure to learn that the letters between this country and Hamburg had so rapidly increased since the reduction in the rate previously mentioned, as already to have made up the former amount of postage.

During these transactions in Europe, I had the high gratification to learn that the leading measure

of my plan had been introduced to some extent into the United States, and that the President had announced to Congress his desire to reduce the postage throughout the Union; a measure carried into effect in the spring of 1845, when the postage was fixed at five cents (two-pence-halfpenny) for distances within three hundred miles, and ten cents between places more remote.

At home, however, the Liberal party wisely judged that the time for further parliamentary action on the subject of postal reform was not yet come, though occasional motions on postal affairs showed that the question did not altogether sleep.

In the course of a debate on June 7th, 1845, Mr. Hume said:—

‘There was no country in the world ever derived a greater benefit from an Act of Parliament than this obtained by the adoption of the penny postage system; but the old establishment had not been adapted to the new arrangements, and consequently much of the advantage which the system was calculated to afford to the public was lost by a perseverance in the former state of things.’

Meantime, an occurrence took place which brought postal affairs, on a point of much importance, repeatedly before Parliament and the country. This was the opening of letters to and from Signor Mazzini and other Italian exiles, by authority of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, from whose name such practices were for a time termed “Grahamizing,” though, in truth, Sir James Graham was by no means their originator. The unhappy consequences, however, in this particular instance, raised so strong a feeling of indignation against the individual minister, as in great measure to withdraw public attention from the precedent pleaded in his defence. There were two debates on the subject in each House in June, 1844, and these were followed by many further discussions, ending in each House

by the grant of a committee of inquiry, each of which made its Report in the following August. In that of the Lords alone there is reference, and that I think somewhat obscure, to what, as I afterwards learned, was a regular practice at the Post Office, though for it the Post Office authorities were no-wise responsible. Incredible as it may appear to my readers, it is nevertheless true that so late as 1844 a system, dating from some far distant time, was in full operation, under which clerks from the Foreign Office used to attend on the arrival of mails from abroad, to open the letters addressed to certain ministers resident in England, and make from them such extracts as they deemed useful for the service of Government. Happily, the feeling manifested on this occasion led to the entire abandonment of this most questionable expedient; though it must be recorded that a motion made by Mr. Duncombe, on April 9th, 1845, to forbid the further opening of letters under any circumstances, was lost; the House apparently holding that there were circumstances which might render such an expedient just and necessary. I may remark, however, that in the ten years during which I had opportunity for direct knowledge on the subject, it was never resorted to except in a very few cases relating, so far as I can recollect, exclusively to social offenders, burglars, and others.

I cannot close this portion of my narrative without mentioning one small but curious incident. In May, 1845, I received a letter from my friend Dr. Henderson, informing me that there was a tract in the British Museum, dated as far back as 1659, and entitled 'A Penny Post,' the author of which bore my own surname. On application to my friend Dr. Gray, I received, through his kindness, a manuscript copy of the same, which is still in my possession. The title is as follows: 'A Penny Post, or a

Vindication of the Liberty and Birthright of every Englishman in Carrying Merchants' and other Men's Letters, against any Restraint of Farmers of such Employments. By John Hill, 1659.'

Upon examining its contents, I found that the term 'penny post' was used by the author to signify a post at the rate of one penny per stage, the mails being then conveyed on horseback by couriers, whose chief duty was the conveyance of Government despatches; and that the writer's aim was to protest at once against any augmentation of this rate, and against postal conveyance, including the carriage of small parcels, being treated as a Government monopoly. The tract, which is very short, is no doubt still accessible to the curious at the British Museum.

I now come to a proceeding of no small importance to myself, whether regarded as an attestation of my services, or as an augmentation of my means. In March, 1844, the Mercantile Committee, so frequently mentioned in this narrative, issued an advertisement inviting subscriptions to a testimonial in my favour.

About a month later Mr. Travers, an active member of the committee, wrote to inform me that Sir Robert Peel had placed his name on the subscription list, a notification which of course gave me considerable pleasure. Generally speaking, however, I was most properly left uninformed as to details; but in December of the same year, I received a letter from Mr. Estlin, an eminent surgeon of Bristol, giving an account of proceedings in that important city anterior to any movement in London; and, in point of fact, I believe it was in Bristol, and from Mr. Estlin, that the testimonial had its origin. I may add that, so far as I am aware, the first London paper in which the measure was advocated was one in which I believe Mr. Estlin may have had some influence. It was a

paper of limited circulation, called 'The Inquirer,' and I was informed that the article in question was from the pen of the editor, the Rev. William Hincks. Neither of these gentlemen now survives; but, feeling how much I owe to both, I cannot omit this small tribute to their memory.

In January, 1845, the Manchester portion of the subscription being complete, I was requested to receive it at once, from the hands of the late Sir Thomas Potter, who, being in advanced age and feeble health, felt doubtful as to living to see the close of the subscription as a whole. For this purpose I was invited to Hastings, where Sir Thomas was passing the winter, was hospitably entertained by his son-in-law—Mr. Scriven, then mayor of the borough—and, amidst little ceremony but much kindness, received the amount subscribed, viz., 1432*l.* Shortly afterwards I received from Mr. Cadell, the publisher, the amount raised in Edinburgh—626*l.*; and some months later, from Mr. (afterwards Sir William) Brown and Mr. S. S. Gair, the amount raised in Liverpool—728*l.*; and, lastly, I received from Sir George Larpent a formal copy of the resolutions of the Mercantile Committee, together with a cheque for 10,000*l.*, the final presentation being deferred until the accounts should be entirely made up.

Of course the main proceeding made its way into the newspapers, and thus became known to the public in general, and to the Commissioners of the Income Tax in particular—the consequence being an application from the Commissioners for Brighton, demanding income-tax upon the chief amount. Finding that representations to them produced no effect, I overleaped the next stage, and went at once to Mr. Trevelyan at the Treasury, who, like the Duke of Wellington on a well known occasion, exclaimed,

“This is too bad!” adding, “It will never do first to deprive you of your salary, and then to tax the public subscription made in lieu of it. Leave this to me.” I willingly agreed, and a few days later received a letter from the Income Tax Commissioners, enclosing an instruction from the chief office for the withdrawal of the demand.

It would be ungrateful to omit mention here of some indications of public satisfaction besides those of a pecuniary nature. Thus, in 1844, I received a communication from Mr. (afterwards Sir Thomas) Blakie, Provost of Aberdeen, announcing my admission to the freedom of that borough, and a similar announcement from Mr. Wilson, town clerk of Hawick. I was likewise spontaneously elected an honorary member of the Brighton Literary Institution, of the Manchester Athenæum, and of some other societies.

I received also the following striking letter from Mr. Cobden :—

Manchester, 30th May, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,

* * * *

The League will be virtually dissolved by the passing of Peel's measure. I shall feel like an emancipated negro—having fulfilled my seven years' apprenticeship to an agitation which has known no respite. I feel that *you* have done not a little to strike the fetters from my limbs, for without the penny postage we might have had more years of agitation and anxiety.

Believe me, faithfully yours,

RICHARD COBDEN.

BOWLAND HILL, Esq.

Probably Mr. Cobden, in this letter, referred merely to the great facility given by cheap postage for the transmission and circulation of those papers which played so material a part in the Anti-Corn Law agitation; but it seems not unlikely that other

assistance may have been afforded to his great improvement by the success, so far as then ascertained, of my measure, as a bold reduction of taxation—a change much more sudden and decided than had ever before taken place in our fiscal system. I believe I am safe in assuming that this success has acted as an encouragement to the many adventurous changes in taxation which have followed one another in rapid succession even to the present time.

Among the many minor evidences to the benefit derived from cheap postage, the following little circumstance was not the least pleasing. The late Mr. Tremenheere told me that a servant-boy in his father's house in London, learning that his mother in Somersetshire was dangerously ill, wrote home for a daily bulletin, which he duly received until the danger was over, eagerly rushing every morning to the door at the first sound of the postman's knock. Such an occurrence would seem trivial now; it was felt then as a striking novelty.

The formal presentation of the Testimonial took place at Blackwall on June the 17th, 1846, a public dinner being given on the occasion. Of the reports given in the newspapers, the most complete appeared in the 'Morning Chronicle' of the following day; but I must not omit to add that, besides the persons mentioned as present, there were also my father (then in his eighty-fourth year), all my brothers, my brother-in-law, and my only son. Gratifying letters also were read from Earl Fortescue, from Lord Ashburton, who stated that the benefit of postal reform had exceeded his expectations, from the Bishop of Durham (Dr. Maltby), from Lord Robert Grosvenor, who spoke of penny postage as the first and most valuable instalment of free-trade, from Lord J. Stewart, Mr. Wallace, Mr. Ward, M.P., who remarked that Mr. Hill had been one of the most

useful men of the age, but one of the most illused, and from the Earl of Radnor, who expressed similar sentiments. The chairman of the Mercantile Committee being unable to attend, the chair was taken by Mr. Warburton.

After the reading of these letters, the usual forms having been gone through, a report was read by the secretary of the Testimonial Committee, from which it appeared that the net amount of the subscription was upwards of 13,000*l.*; and after mention of the sum already presented, a cheque was handed to me for the remainder. The committee expressed its opinion that the amount would have been larger had not individual subscriptions been limited at the outset to 10*l.* 10*s.*; a rule not departed from save in the case of the City of London, the Bank of England, and a few other corporations. The report also, contrasting the testimony from the Treasury to the value of my services with the fact of my dismissal, urged my recall. It then adverted to the progress obtained in the amount of correspondence, even under the imperfect adoption of my plan, and ended by pointing out the far larger benefits which would accrue had the plan been fairly and fully carried out.

The chairman, after touching on the amount of the subscriptions, and the extent of the service to be recognised, referred also to the efforts of Mr. Wallace, the adoption of the plan by Lord Melbourne's Government, and my dismissal by the present administration; pointing out, however, that among the subscribers to the Testimonial Fund was to be reckoned the First Lord of the Treasury, Sir Robert Peel. After seconding the Committee's demand for my recall to office, he ended by proposing my health.

In my reply, after expressing my thanks to all who had contributed to the munificent gift which I had received, and especially to those who had taken

a leading part in promoting the subscription, I proceeded to speak of the public services of those who had assisted in the great work of postal reform ; naturally assigning the first place to Mr. Wallace, and also particularizing Mr. Warburton, the Mercantile Committee, with its agent, Mr. Ashurst, the members of the Parliamentary Committee—Lords Ashburton, Brougham, and Radnor, and the Duke of Richmond, all of whom had supported the measure in the Lords—and last, but not least, Mr. Baring, referring also to the support which I had received during the two years I had the good fortune to act under him, and to the confidence and friendship with which he honoured me.

I then proceeded to a short review of the principal results of penny postage up to that time, showing that, even with the very limited adoption of my plan, considerable progress had been made towards the recovery of the revenue and that large multiplication of letters on which I had counted ; the number of letters delivered within twelve miles of St. Martin's-le-Grand being already equal to that delivered under the old system throughout the whole United Kingdom.

I next touched upon those yet more important benefits which could not be exhibited in a statistical form ; and upon this point I was happily able to quote from a recent speech of Mr. Goulburn, made on the bringing-in of his Budget, the passage being as follows :—

‘ It would be a fallacy to suppose that the country is only relieved by a remission of taxation to the amount of the loss experienced by the Exchequer. Nothing can be more erroneous. When you reduce a tax you should calculate the amount of relief afforded upon the increased consumption of that article ; you cannot take as a measure of the relief of the pressure upon the people the amount which you collect less in the revenue.’

Now, by applying this rule to the determination of the amount of relief afforded by the reduction of the postage rates, even taking such reduction at only fivepence per letter, it would appear that the total benefit amounted to the enormous sum of 6,000,000*l.* per annum.*

Having thus dealt with the past and present, I proceeded to speak of the future; and here I turned again to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as a judge certainly free from all suspicion of undue leaning towards penny postage, for an opinion as to the results to be expected from those improvements for which I had so strenuously contended. In the same speech he anticipated "that the revenue of the Post Office, as additional facilities are given, will continue to present a large annual increase;" and further on he estimated the net postal revenue for the current year at 850,000*l.* I was able, even then, truly to add—and I may observe, in passing, that this remark has since that time been frequently repeated by others—that there was no branch of the revenue the increase of which was so steady and rapid as the revenue of the Post Office; and I pointed out that as education became more and more extended, a large increase of correspondence, and consequently of revenue, might be confidently expected; the more so because, great as the actual amount appeared when viewed in the aggregate, the average yielded by its division amongst the whole population was but one letter per month for each person; while if the time should ever come when the average postage of the country would equal that given by the domestic correspondence of my own family, including children and servants, the annual gross revenue of

* Application of the same rule to the letters of the year 1868 would raise the amount of relief to nearly 17,000,000*l.*

the Post Office would amount to more than 40,000,000*l.*—or twentyfold its actual sum.

But if the present imperfect arrangements afforded such results as those which had actually been realized, what would be the effect of adopting the whole plan? Little had been done towards this during the last three years, but at least one valuable move the Post Office had reluctantly made, establishing new deliveries in London to the extent, if not of six, as recommended by myself, yet to that of three; and the effect was immediately to advance the annual rate of increase in the number of district letters by 50 per cent. This improvement had not been followed by that earlier delivery of the general post letters which I had offered to effect without any material addition to expense, but such acceleration the Post Office had declared impossible. However, there might still be hope on this point, seeing that other alleged impossibilities had been surmounted—viz., those relative to the Gloucester mail and the mails to the Channel Islands; the improvements suggested by myself on both points having now been carried into effect, and that with a saving in expense of, I believed, 11,000*l.* a-year; and if done exactly as I had proposed, no doubt with increased convenience to the service.

In the department of economy, however, much remained to be effected, and that not by a reduction of salaries, nor by increasing the labours of the men, but by simplifying the mechanism of the Post Office; and I added that, seeing how much room there was for further improvement, and yet how near the results actually obtained approached to those anticipated from the complete development of the plan, I thought we were fully justified in assuming that, but for the unfortunate interruption in the progress of the measure which took place on the retirement of the

liberal Government, there would ere this have been no exception whatever to the realization of our anticipations.

I then referred to the good effects of penny postage on the action of other countries; its adoption by the British Parliament having already led to reductions in Russia, Prussia, Austria, Spain, and the United States of America.

I continued as follows:—

‘Before I conclude, I must request your kind indulgence while I lay before you a brief statement of the manner in which the establishment of penny postage has affected myself. It is notorious that a reformer must not expect a life of ease and comfort. Judging from my own experience, he must make up his mind to labour hard, to encounter much disappointment, and to have his motives and conduct misunderstood and misrepresented. Still, when I compare my own with the course of early reformers, I cannot but feel that, independent even of the munificent reward which your kindness has bestowed upon me, I have in many respects been most fortunate. Sir Samuel Romilly tried year after year in vain to effect so obvious an improvement as the abolition of capital punishment for privately stealing in a shop to the extent of five shillings. This attempt met with but little support from the people, while it was opposed by the Government of the day, by Lord Chancellor Eldon, and by Chief Justice Ellenborough. I, on the contrary, have seen my plan, however imperfectly, brought into practice, and none but those who have laboured long and anxiously to effect an important improvement can form any conception of the gratification which such a result brings with it. There was, however, one period of my course to which I cannot even now revert without pain. I allude to that period when, with my health impaired by six years of incessant labour and anxiety, I was dismissed from the Treasury, and left to seek afresh the means of supporting my family. I have on a former occasion expressed my thanks to Sir Robert Peel for the kind manner in which he has more than once been pleased to speak of my labours. I now thank him for the honour he has done me in contributing to the Testimonial;

but had he yielded to my entreaties to be allowed, at any pecuniary sacrifice to myself, to work out my own plan—to prove that I had not misled the public as to its results, nor even adopted those sanguine views which in a projector might perhaps be forgiven, however erroneous ;—had he done this, my gratitude would have been unbounded. But severe as was the disappointment which I felt, and still feel, at being unjustly deprived of all participation in the execution and completion of my own plan—in seeing it left in the hands of gentlemen who feel no interest in its success, and who, I must say, have evinced no peculiar aptitude either for comprehending its principles, or for devising and executing the necessary details—even at that moment of severe disappointment, I can truly say that I felt no regret at having embarked in the great work of Post Office improvement. The only duty that then remained for me to perform was to see that the facts of the case were placed on record, and this, by the aid of Sir Thomas Wilde, Mr. Baring (the late Chancellor of the Exchequer), Mr. Hawes, and other friends, for whose kindness on that trying occasion I can never feel too grateful, was accomplished. Soon afterwards some kind friends proposed the Testimonial, the successful completion of which we are now met to celebrate. The measure was promptly taken up by the Mercantile Committee on Postage. Men whose every moment is precious gave up their time willingly to promote this object. Friends whom I had never seen started up in every part of the kingdom ; and the result is the largest subscription ever raised to reward an individual for public services. * * * Nearly the whole fund had been safely and advantageously invested, and this investment, added to my own small property, is, with my frugal habits, amply sufficient to relieve my mind from anxiety with regard to a permanent provision for my family.’

After apologising for this reference to private affairs, I concluded thus :—

‘I trust that you, as well as the thousands of my friends and benefactors who are not now present, will not judge of the strength of my feelings by the feebleness of their expression, but that you and all will believe that I, and every member of my family, feel truly grateful for the princely gift, and for the high honour which have been conferred upon us.’

Mr. Dillon, in proposing the health of Mr. Wallace and of the members of the Parliamentary Committee of 1838, observed that—

‘Whilst the letters of the principals of commercial establishments had increased fourfold, the letters of the persons employed in them had increased tenfold, which he considered a great proof of the social advantages conferred by Mr. Rowland Hill’s plan. It was without a parallel in the history of reform, that the first enunciation of it should have been perfect. Much yet remained to be done. Though they talked of Post Office reform, the Post Office was not yet reformed. The Post Office ought to be free from patronage, and its officers chosen because they were fit for its administration.’

The proceedings closed with short speeches from Lord Ebrington, the Hon. C. P. Villiers, M.P., Mr. Leaf, Mr. Hutt, M.P., and lastly Mr. Moffatt, M.P., the most active and zealous promoter of the subscription.

CHAPTER XV.

APPOINTMENT TO POST OFFICE. (1846.)

ALTHOUGH I was confident that the return of the Liberals to power was but a question of time, and indeed of no very long time, it followed so rapidly upon the events already mentioned as almost to take me, and I suppose many others, by surprise. After holding office somewhat less than five years, Sir Robert Peel found himself without adequate support in the House which had raised him to power, and on the 29th of the month in which I received my testimonial he resigned.

Six days later I received the following letter from the late Sir Benjamin Hawes :—

9, Queen Square, July 5th, 1846.

DEAR HILL,

I write to you as a very dignified personage—the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies—God save us! Not the Board of Trade, not the Treasury, not the Home Office—in all of which places I should have known something of my work—but the Colonies! And forced into it, too!—having given it up. Driven again into the toils and caught. How I shall do I know not.

Lord Grey my chief, too, in the Lords—and one sure to cut out plenty of work—work for attack and defence too.

Pray send me your benedictions, for I need those of all my friends—and *pray for the Colonies too!*

* * * * *

Yours truly, always,

B. HAWES.

I think our Government pretty strongly cast. Charles Buller is Judge Advocate.

Mr. C. Buller had been an earnest supporter of postal reform.

Although I became aware, by repeated conversations I had had with him, that Mr. Hawes confidently reckoned upon my recall, yet, knowing that he could have no direct power in the matter, I was naturally desirous of further evidence as to the intentions of the new administration. Mr. Warburton, who was always believed to have great influence with Liberals in power as well as out of power, and who, as the reader is well aware, had ever shown himself a most earnest friend of penny postage, and no less of myself, undertook to communicate with the Government. If Mr. Baring had returned to his former post all external movement would have been superfluous; but, for whatever reason, he was not included in the new ministry. However, on July 30th, Mr. Warburton wrote word that he had had an interview with the new Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sir Charles Wood, now Lord Halifax), and would be glad to see me on the morrow. Of his oral communication I have retained no record, but according to my recollection the Chancellor had spoken of difficulties, had thought that the best post for me would be, not at the Treasury as before, but at the Post Office, into which, however, he did not yet see how my introduction could be managed without disturbance to the department. In short, the matter was a problem, and time would be required for its solution. I resolved, therefore, to make good use of the interim, and entering on the longest holiday I had ever known, went abroad for that change of scene and thought which alone could fit me for the arduous duties in which I expected soon to be engaged.

Throughout my tour I had the pleasure to find my reform and myself objects of considerable interest; at Brussels I was waited on by some of the leading

representatives, and in the Canton of Zurich I found already established a uniform postage, payable in stamps, with a rate somewhat lower than a penny. I may add that, some time afterwards, though with some little increase of rate, the reform was extended to the whole Swiss Republic.

Meantime some events of interest passed at home. On August 22nd Mr. Duncombe, in the House of Commons, again complained of the management of the Post Office. In the course of the debate Mr. Parker (Secretary to the Treasury) stated that the new Postmaster-General (Lord Clanricarde) had found "the whole establishment in a most unsatisfactory condition."* Mr. Hume, in terms highly complimentary to me, urged my recall. The Premier, Lord John Russell, admitted "that he was by no means satisfied with the state of the Post Office, nor did he think the plans of reform instituted by Mr. Hill had been sufficiently carried out;"† and Mr. Warburton, referring to Lord John Russell's admission, strongly urged my reappointment to office.

My first intimation of this debate was received in a letter from Mr. Warburton, of which the following is the closing passage :—

'I think it manifest from this statement of Lord John Russell that a reform in the Post Office is meditated in good earnest. * * * You must be within call, if wanted.'

A memorial urging my recall had been sent up from Cupar Fife some time before, and soon afterwards petitions to the same effect were forwarded from the Liverpool Guardian Society, and the town itself; and these were followed by other memorials and petitions of the same tenour from various quarters. Mr. Brown, then M.P. for South Lancashire, thought himself authorized, in the interest of his constituents,

* 'Hansard,' vol. lxxxviii. p. 957.

† p. 959.

to write to Lord Clanricarde on the subject; and though his lordship, of course, declined to discuss such a question in writing to an individual Member of Parliament, his reply, which was forwarded to me, was on the whole not unfavourable.

On November 2nd, five days after my return from abroad, I received a letter from Mr. Warburton, of which the following is the substance. He had just seen Lord Clanricarde (at his request), who said that, knowing Mr. Warburton's interest in me and in Post Office matters, he wished to have some conversation with him before negotiating directly with me. There were difficulties in the way of giving me any high existing office in the Post Office, and objections thereto. The office of secretary, for instance, was so loaded with detail, that if given me, whose office should be to advise, suggest, and consider of improvements, my utility would be destroyed. On the other hand, there were objections to an office of the nature held before, on account of antagonism with the Post Office. His lordship thought the fittest appointment would be one constituting me the adviser of the Postmaster-General. He thought that such an office, which every day's experience convinced him was necessary, might be constituted by himself at once. Mr. Warburton informed his lordship that, from some conversation he had had with me, he knew that I would not accept any office from the Government which might be regarded as a mode of putting me on the shelf; but that if an office of permanence and dignity, connecting me with the Post Office—not placing me under the secretary—and giving me sufficient weight to carry out my plans of improvement were offered, it would be accepted; that the office suggested by his lordship wanted permanence. I might be dismissed, as before, by some cabal of the officers of the department. They would bide their time until a Postmaster-

General should be appointed who would cashier me. If the office were ephemeral, I could be of no utility ; resistance to my proposed measures would be protracted until they could be defeated by a change of dynasty. He added that on his (Mr. W.'s) suggestion, Lord Clanricarde would have an interview with me on the subject. Mr. Warburton obtained Lord Clanricarde's permission to repeat to me what had passed.

Having procured an appointment with Lord Clanricarde, I called upon him two days later ; but of my conversation with him on this occasion, and at a second interview, I have no further record than the following : "Saw Lord Clanricarde twice during the negotiation ; much pleased with his straightforward, businesslike manner." I remember, however, that I suggested for his lordship's consideration the revival of the title assigned to Palmer, viz., Surveyor-General of the Post Office, and that in consequence of his inquiry as to the circumstances of Palmer's appointment, I undertook to send him a report on the subject.

On the following day, I received a letter from his lordship, in which, after expressing a wish to hear my more considered opinion of the proposal which he had intimated to me, he continued as follows :—

'I assure you that I am convinced such an appointment as that I wish you to hold—we will not quarrel about a *name* for it—would afford the best possible opportunity (under all existing circumstances) for carrying out steadily, safely, and constantly, every possible improvement in the Post Office, in conformity with your plan and general views.'

Objection having arisen to the revival of Palmer's official title, and my position being, as I well knew, matter of grave importance to my efficiency in office, I wrote to Mr. Warburton on the 17th, but was prevented by his illness at the time from receiving that

immediate assistance which in health he was always so ready, I might say so eager, to give.

Meantime the negotiation was carried on by Mr. Hawes; who, as already seen, was at once a member of the Government and exceedingly zealous for my interests; but in the course of it a vexatious mistake occurred, which was by no means without injurious effect. Knowing how difficult it would be for me, after all that had passed, to co-operate either harmoniously or successfully with Colonel Maberly, I urged the importance of the step actually taken eight years later, viz., of removing him to some other office. To this it was replied that there was no post available for the purpose, save at lower salary than he was then receiving; and as the loss involved was said to be 300*l.* a year, I expressed my perfect willingness to sacrifice that sum for the purpose of indemnification. My salary at the Treasury, it may be remembered, was 1500*l.* a year (the same as that of the Secretary to the Post Office); and I now said that I was ready to accept 1200*l.*, provided only my position were such as would enable me to carry out promptly, and efficiently the remaining parts of my plan. Unluckily for me, it came to pass that, while my offer as to salary was caught at, the accompanying stipulation was somehow set aside; the definite proposal being that I should take office as Secretary to the Postmaster-General with a salary of 1200*l.* a year; thus placing me in a lower position than that which I had previously occupied at the Treasury. When I pointed out this to Mr. Hawes, he expressed his regret at the perverse form the thing had taken, but saying that the error could not now be retrieved, gave it as his earnest advice that I should accept the proposal as it stood. Upon my objecting to this, he urged that the arrangement was but temporary; for that as soon as I should have

demonstrated my fitness for the entire control of the department, I should doubtless be placed at the head. As I still resisted, his urgency increased. He warned me, that if I now declined, my plans might remain for ever incomplete, for that no second opportunity was likely to be offered; and he concluded with the words, "Let me implore you to accept it." To such an exhortation from a kind and valued friend I could not return an abrupt answer, and though grievously disconcerted at what had occurred, I promised to consider the matter.

Here, then, I found myself in a painful dilemma. On the one side I was called on to accept a lower position than before, and thus to maintain from inferior ground a contest which had almost worn me out when the ground was equal; to consent to carry out my plans, if at all, through wearisome controversy, over factitious obstacles, and by reluctant hands; perhaps to break down in the trial, and thus leave my work still undone: on the other hand, could I let slip this, my sole chance, as it appeared, of at least attempting to complete the great task on which I had entered? Could I disappoint the friends who had striven so earnestly on my behalf, and for the promotion of my great object? Could I forget the noble subscription raised for me by the public, and seem to show, by my acts, that I preferred emolument to achievement, or doggedly stood out for unimportant distinctions of title or position? The question was a very difficult one, and though, after much consideration, I felt inclined to give way, I resolved first to consult all such of my brothers as were within reach. The result in each case was curiously identical, though for some reason, now forgotten, I had to consult them severally. Each began with an indignant ejaculation at the terms as they stood, and a declaration that they could not be

accepted; but each, after hearing the matter to the end, came to the conclusion that, unworthy as was the treatment to which I was subjected, it would not do to forego what might prove to be my only opportunity of completing my great work; and since my own conviction accorded with theirs, I wrote to Mr. Hawes in acceptance of the offer. As the letter fully sets forth my reasons for this step, I give it *in extenso*.

Brighton, November 23rd, 1846.

MY DEAR HAWES,

You will be glad to learn that I have decided to accept the offer of Government of a permanent appointment as secretary to the Postmaster-General, at a salary of 1200*l.* a year.

The opinion so strongly expressed by Mr. Warburton and yourself as to the necessity for so doing, backed as it now is by that of Mr. Samuel Jones Loyd, has overborne my own objections, though I cannot say that it has removed them, as I still feel great apprehension that, notwithstanding the promises of support which I have received from the Postmaster-General and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I shall have to encounter that opposition which has hitherto been so successful in retarding the progress of penny postage, and on some occasions of resisting the most positive orders of the Treasury.

You are aware that, with a view to neutralise, or at least diminish this formidable opposition, I was willing to sacrifice a large proportion of my own salary, in order to enable the Government to offer Colonel Maberly his full salary as a retiring allowance. It is not for me to discuss the reasons which have led to Colonel Maberly's retention in office, but it obviously is my duty carefully to consider how far such retention ought to influence my own conduct.

This difficult question has occupied my mind for several days, and the result, I am sorry to say, is a confirmation of the opinion which I expressed to you and Mr. Warburton when the offer was first communicated to me, namely, that, under the circumstances of the case, to accept office would expose the improvements which remain to be effected to a serious risk of failure, and thus perhaps bring discredit on

the general plan as well as on myself; and consequently that I should best consult the public interest and my own by respectfully declining the offer of Government. I need not tell you that I am most anxious for an opportunity of completing my plan, and that throughout these negotiations I have proposed no conditions, except that I should have the authority requisite to secure the success of the measure. Much will undoubtedly be done by making my office permanent, and by placing me in immediate communication with the Postmaster-General, as well as the Treasury; but I fear this is not enough. I think Colonel Maberly should have been induced to resign. I see almost insuperable difficulty in attempting to collect information and to issue instructions otherwise than through the general secretary's office, and yet, judging from past experience, it appears hopeless to look for his voluntary co-operation, while his position makes him too strong to be effectually coerced. But assuming that Colonel Maberly must remain in office, then I think that my appointment should have been one of at least equal rank with his. This point, as will be seen by the published correspondence, was fully considered when I went into the Treasury, and the reasons which then existed, the strength of which was in effect admitted by Mr. Baring, apply with at least equal force now.

These are my own views on the subject, and I think it best to state them without reserve; but seeing that Mr. Warburton, Mr. Loyd, and yourself entertain a different opinion, that you all express a strong conviction to the effect that if this opportunity of completing my plan be lost no other will be afforded me, that public opinion would not support me in declining the offer, and that I may look forward to a probable reorganisation of the Post Office, and, if I show that I possess the requisite administrative powers, to promotion, at no distant period, to a position of higher authority—I am naturally led to distrust my own opinions, and to adopt the safer guidance of my kind and able advisers.

After an interval of four years, during which my attention has necessarily been devoted to other matters, I am therefore about to enter on my arduous task. I shall look forward with as much hope and as little apprehension as I can; but if improvement in the mechanism and in the revenue of the

Post Office should be less rapid than I had anticipated under the impression that opposing influences would be removed, I cannot doubt that Government and the country will do me the justice to bear in mind the peculiar difficulties of my position, and to recollect that, whatever circumstances limit my power, they to the same extent limit my responsibility also.

Though the fact does not at all touch the public ground to which, in considering this question, I have endeavoured to confine my attention, I may be excused for mentioning that my acceptance of the appointment, accompanied as it must be by the abandonment of my present occupation, will be attended with an increase of labour and a sacrifice of income.

I am sure you will excuse my troubling you with this letter. My object is, first, to give you the earliest intimation of my decision, and, second, to place on record the circumstances of the case while they are fresh in our memories. To any other member of the Government than yourself I could not speak in so unreserved a manner.

I remain, &c., &c.,

ROWLAND HILL.

P. S. * * * November 24th. I have kept back my letter in order that I may show it to Mr. Warburton, who authorizes me to say that he approves of it.

Two days afterwards I received a letter from the Postmaster-General, requesting that I would call upon him on the following Saturday; and having meantime inquired of Mr. Warburton whether there were any further information which he thought it important for me to receive before this interview, I had a letter from him, in which he mentioned that he had told Lord Clanricarde of my acceptance of the offer made by Government, accompanying his announcement with the remark that those whom I had consulted had been in doubt as to the advice they should give, fearing that Colonel Maberly would be able to thwart me in my exertions. Mr. Warburton's letter then proceeded as follows :—

‘That the objections had been overcome by the promises

of support which had been given both by his lordship and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and by the assurance of the latter that, if you proved yourself an able administrator, you were to look forward to promotion.'

A few days later, having in the meantime called on the Postmaster General, I received my formal appointment; and this was preceded and followed by many letters of congratulation; among others, one from Mr. Parker of the Treasury, and an *ex-officio* opponent of mine, though a perfectly fair one, on the Parliamentary Committee of 1838, one from M. Piron of the French Post Office, from Mr. Hutt, from Colonel Torrens, and a long letter from Mr. Baring. Not the least welcome, however, was a very kind letter from Mr. Wallace, whom, much to my sorrow, I had offended some time before, by attributing the Report of the Committee of 1839 to Mr. Warburton, while Mr. Wallace erroneously believed that it was substantially his own. I could not but rejoice at the restoration of friendly intercourse with one to whom I owed so much.

As I had again cast in my lot with the Post Office, I withdrew, of course, from my previous employments, resigning all my directorships; already three in number.

I was now in my fifty-second year, and in the tenth from that in which I first took Post Office reform seriously into my thoughts. I need not say that the interval had been a period of very hard work, that a decade in my life was in every sense gone; in short, that I was already somewhat old for the great work of reform that still lay before me.

APPENDIX A. (Page 52.)

 VERNIER PENDULUM.

Bruce Castle, Tottenham,
June 7th, 1832.

To the Council of the Royal Astronomical Society.

GENTLEMEN,

IN troubling you with the following sketch of an improvement in astronomical clocks, I have a twofold object. First, to obtain the loan of the necessary instruments, should you consider the plan worth prosecuting; and, secondly, to avail myself of the suggestions of such members of the Society as are more experienced than myself in the minute details of practical astronomy. The objects of the proposed improvement are: To supply an apparatus capable of measuring time to a small fraction of a second, and to make the determination of the exact time a matter of calm and deliberate enquiry, and thus to avoid the errors which must frequently arise from the hurry attending the present method.

In order to accomplish these objects, I propose to make use of the principle of the Vernier, by suspending in front of the clock an additional pendulum somewhat shorter than that of the clock, and so placed that the coincidence of the two when vertical may be determined by means similar to those used by Captain Kater; this additional or Vernier pendulum to be put in motion at the instant of observation by means of a trigger under the command of the observer at the telescope, and its vibrations reckoned till a coincidence takes place between it and the clock pendulum. This pendulum may have a maintaining power and an index to save

the trouble of counting. When at rest, the Vernier pendulum must of course be raised to the extent of its oscillation.

The results of experiments commenced with very imperfect instruments about two years and a half ago, and continued at intervals to the present time, appear to be as follows :—

When a Vernier pendulum, vibrating once in $\cdot 9$ second, or 10 times in 9 seconds, is employed, its coincidences with the seconds pendulum of the clock may be determined to a single vibration with the greatest ease by the unassisted eye, and thus of course tenths of a second are readily estimated.

When a Vernier pendulum vibrating once in $\cdot 99$ second, or 100 times in 99 seconds, is employed, its coincidences with the seconds pendulum of the clock may also be determined to a single vibration, but not without the aid of a telescope. By these means hundredths of a second are measured without much difficulty.

In order to avoid the inconvenience of having to suspend sometimes one pendulum and sometimes the other, and also to escape the loss of time which, if the hundredth's pendulum were constantly used, would arise when the observer wished to estimate tenths of a second only, I propose to adopt the following arrangement: To employ a single Vernier pendulum of such a length as to vibrate once in $\cdot 899$ second, or a thousand times in 899 seconds. This pendulum differs so slightly from the tenths pendulum (making ten vibrations in $8\cdot 99$ seconds, instead of 9 seconds), that for estimating tenths of a second it is practically the same, while it affords the means of measuring hundredths of a second also. Its operation will be best understood by an example: Suppose the interval to be measured by means of the Vernier to be $\cdot 24$ second. At the second and third vibrations of the Vernier pendulum after its release there would be approximate coincidences between it and the clock pendulum, showing the fraction of time to be between two tenths and three tenths of a second. The coincidence at the second vibration would, however, be somewhat nearer than that at the third. At the twelfth vibration there would be another approximate coincidence somewhat closer than the first. At the twenty-second vibration there would be a yet closer

coincidence. At the thirty-second one closer still, and at the forty-second vibration the coincidence would be the most accurate of the series. Thus it appears that the tenths of a second may be known by counting single vibrations of the Vernier pendulum till a coincidence of some kind occurs, and that the hundredths of a second may be determined by counting the decades of vibrations, or all the coincidences after the first, until the most exact coincidence arises.

By the use of the Vernier pendulum, when connected with an index, all chance of error in reading the clock will it is conceived be avoided. Having touched the trigger at the moment of observation, the observer has, as it were, registered the time, and he may examine the clock at his leisure, for it is manifest that a comparison of the index of the Vernier pendulum with that of the clock will at any time determine the moment of observation. It will also be seen that should the observer omit to notice the first coincidence of the pendulums no inconvenience except delay will arise, because the same coincidences will occur in a regular series as long as the pendulums continue in motion.

There are a few provisions necessary for extreme accuracy which in this hasty sketch it would be out of place to notice. I will just mention, however, that the apparatus contains within itself the means of measuring what may be called *the mean error of the observer*, or the average interval which, as regards the particular individual, elapses between the instant of observation and the release of the Vernier pendulum.

To subject the plan which I have here attempted hastily to describe to a rigid trial, will require instruments of much greater accuracy than those which I can command, and if the Society possess a good clock not now in use, I shall feel extremely obliged if I can obtain the loan of it. An additional pendulum the requisite length, is not, I presume, to be found among the Society's instruments.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

ROWLAND HILL.

APPENDIX B. (Page 94.)

EXTRACT FROM THE GREENOCK ADVERTISER, OF FRIDAY,
MARCH 8th, 1850.

*Testimonial to ROBERT WALLACE, Esq., late M. P. for
Greenock. The Pioneer of Postage Reform.*

ROWLAND HILL, Esq., rose amid the most enthusiastic applause, and said—Ladies and Gentlemen, the Committee for promoting Mr. Wallace's Testimonial having done me the honour to invite me to take a part in this day's proceedings, I felt bound, at whatever inconvenience to myself, to attend, and to repeat the testimony which I have always gladly borne to the great and important aid afforded by your late representative, my esteemed and venerable friend Mr. Wallace, in the promotion of Penny Postage. (Applause.) With the view of enabling you fairly to estimate the value of Mr. Wallace's important services, it will be necessary to take a brief review of his career as a Post-Office Reformer. I need not remind you that Mr. Wallace entered the House of Commons as your representative in the year 1833. At this time the Post Office was considered by the public nearly perfect. But although several improvements had been effected under the administration of the Duke of Richmond, probably no department of government had during the previous twenty years improved so little, and yet no department had been so free from attack and complaint. It is true that the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry had a short time before, with great ability, exposed much mismanagement in the Post Office, and had recommended various improvements (some of which were afterwards taken up by Mr. Wallace, and some still later by myself), but these exposures and

recommendations, buried as they were in ponderous parliamentary reports, attracted little attention from the public, who still continued to view the Post Office as a vast and mysterious, but nearly perfect machine. (Hear, hear.) I can scarcely think, however, that it could have been so viewed by the Government. They must, one would think, have been impressed with the remarkable fact, that since the close of the war, notwithstanding the great increase of population, and the still greater increase of commercial activity, the revenue of the Post Office, whether gross or net, had not increased at all. (Hear.) Such was the state of things when Mr. Wallace, in the year 1833, first roused the attention of Parliament and the public to the urgent necessity for reform in the Post-office, which he attacked with that perseverance and energy which distinguished all his proceedings; and not satisfied with attacking abuses, Mr. Wallace, even at this early period of his parliamentary career, recommended an important improvement which, subsequently as part of the plan of Penny Postage, was carried into effect with great advantage to the public. The improvement to which I allude was the substitution of charge by weight for charge by enclosure. (Applause.) In the year 1834 Mr. Wallace proposed in Parliament several other important measures, among which were the following:—1st. The opening to public competition of the contract for the construction of the mail coaches. This measure, which was soon after adopted, effected a saving of 17,218*l.* a year. 2d. The consolidation of the London General and District Post Offices. This measure subsequently formed part of the plan of Penny Postage, and was partially carried into effect, with most advantageous results, about three years ago. Much, however, still remains to be accomplished. 3d. The appointment of a Commission of Inquiry into the management of the Post Office. This recommendation was acted upon early in the next year (1835), and the Commission continued its labours till 1838. In the interval the Commission issued no less than ten reports, and it is fairly entitled to the credit of much of the subsequent improvement in the Post Office. During the year 1835, Mr. Wallace appears to have suspended his exertions in Parliament, thinking probably that he should more effectually serve the cause to which he had devoted himself, by assisting

in the investigations of the Commission. Accordingly, I find him giving evidence before that body, in the course of which he recommended the following improvements among others:—

1st. The establishment of day mails, which subsequently formed part of my plan, and has been carried into effect with great advantage to the public and to the revenue. 2d. A reduction in the rates of postage. 3d. More frequent communication between places, Mr. Wallace expressing in an opinion, since confirmed by experience, that the revenue, as well as the public, would be benefited thereby. In 1836 Mr. Wallace resumed his labours in Parliament, recommending among other measures:—1st. A reduction of the rates of postage, naming *8d.* or *9d.* as a maximum. 2d. The registration of letters, since carried into effect with advantage both to the public and to the revenue. (Applause.) 3d. That the postage charge should be regulated by the distance along the shortest practicable road, instead of being determined, as it then was, by the circuitous route through which the Post Office might for its own convenience carry the letter. It is now difficult to believe that only a few years since, a system so monstrous as that which Mr. Wallace successfully attacked, should have been suffered to exist for a single day—a system under which *6d.* or *8d.* was sometimes charged on letters passing between places not more than as many miles asunder, merely because the Post Office for its own convenience preferred to carry the letters round about. (Hear.) I have now arrived at the period when my intercourse with Mr. Wallace commenced; and in order that you may form a just appreciation of the valuable aid afforded me by Mr. Wallace, it is necessary to consider well his position and that of the Post Office at this time. By four years of incessant attacks, Mr. Wallace had destroyed the *prestige* once enjoyed by the Post Office, and had thus exposed it to the wholesome influence of public opinion; in addition to which he had effected some important improvements. By these means he had made the subject of the Post Office his own, and was by general consent the Post Office Reformer of the day. It was therefore in his power greatly to aid, or greatly to discourage, the exertions of others. (Cheers.) In this year (1836), through the intervention of one of my brothers, then Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, I applied to

Mr. Wallace for the loan of any books he might possess relating to the Post Office, and he very kindly lent me various Parliamentary reports and returns. (Hear, hear.) These documents afforded me essential aid in the work which I had long meditated, but in which I then for the first time earnestly engaged. The result was a thorough conviction in my own mind that the inland rate of postage ought to be the same for all distances, and that provided the postage of letters were prepaid, the rate might be reduced as low as 1*d.* throughout the United Kingdom. (Applause.) I did not, however (and I distinctly stated as much at the time), reckon on effecting so vast a reduction without a considerable loss of net revenue, though I did calculate on eventually obtaining as large a gross revenue as before. But the greatest difficulty of my task had still to be overcome. That difficulty consisted in the apparent hopelessness of convincing others that results so startling, and *primâ facie* so paradoxical, could really be derived from a careful examination and, accurate appreciation of the facts of the case. Entertaining these apprehensions, and having regard to Mr. Wallace's position as the leading Post Office Reformer of the day, I was exceedingly anxious as to the view which he might take of my plan. I felt that its success or failure would greatly depend on his verdict. Accordingly, at the beginning of 1837, I sent Mr. Wallace a copy of my pamphlet (which, in the first instance, was printed for private circulation), and waited in the greatest anxiety for his opinion. It came couched in kind and encouraging language, conveying his hearty concurrence in the main features of the plan, and I at once felt that a most important advance had been made. It is impossible to speak too strongly of my obligations to Mr. Wallace at this time. Many a man circumstanced as he was would have treated me as an intruder—as one coming to poach on his warren; but Mr. Wallace, so far from evincing any jealousy, at once gave me all the advantage of his position, and before the public had declared in favour of my plan, he had adopted it with all his accustomed heartiness. (Applause.) Almost immediately on the issue of my pamphlet, both Mr. Wallace and myself were examined by the Post-Office Commissioners with reference to the application of my plan to the London District post—a measure

which the Commissioners recommended, though unfortunately their recommendation was not adopted by the Government. From this time the progress of public opinion in favour of the plan of Penny Postage was so rapid, that before the end of the year Mr. Wallace had succeeded in obtaining the appointment of a committee of the House to investigate its merits. Of this committee Mr. Wallace was the active and indefatigable chairman. It continued to sit throughout the session of 1838, in the course of which it examined no less than eighty-three witnesses; and the labour to the chairman, whose duties were by no means confined to the sittings of the committee, was most severe. The result of the investigation is well known, but it may not be in the recollection of this meeting that the committee having been nominated by Government, which was then unfavourable to Penny Postage, contained several members who were, *ex officio*, opponents of the measure, and that the resolution establishing the vital principle of uniformity of rate was carried only by the casting vote of the chairman. (Hear, hear, and applause.) Had Mr. Wallace given his casting vote on the other side, or even withheld it, the adoption of Penny Postage would probably have been delayed for years, possibly the plan might have been altogether abandoned. The Report of the committee, one of the ablest documents ever laid before Parliament, gave an extraordinary impetus to the demand for Penny Postage, and in the session of 1839 upwards of 2000 petitions, with more than a quarter of a million of signatures (though a large proportion of the petitions being from corporate bodies bore only a single signature each), were presented to the House of Commons alone; and before the end of the session, and within the short space of two years and a-half from its announcement, Penny Postage became the law of the land. (Applause.) During the greater part of this period (at least so long as Parliament was sitting) I was in almost daily communication with Mr. Wallace. The labour which we both had to go through was enormous; and I never shall forget how much I felt cheered and encouraged to persevere, by his own hearty, earnest, and confident manner of encountering the difficulties and disappointments necessarily incidental to so vast an undertaking. (Loud applause.) It would ill become me to speak of the commercial and social

advantages which have resulted from Penny Postage. Under its operation, the number of chargeable letters has increased from 76 millions to 337 millions per annum, and though the net revenue, owing to the enormous cost of railway conveyance and other causes into which I cannot with propriety enter, is much less than my estimate, the gross revenue has realized that estimate, being now nearly, if not quite as great as before the reduction of the rates. But whatever may have been the sacrifice of revenue, most people now readily admit the benefit to the nation at large has been cheaply purchased. (Cheers.) The advantages of cheap Postage however are by no means confined to this country. Our example has been followed, more or less closely, by several of the nations of Europe, and by the United States of America; and it is most gratifying to know that cheap Postage is gradually extending over the civilized world. The manner in which Mr. Wallace, the earliest Post Office reformer of the present generation, has laboured zealously and successfully to bring about these happy results, has been shown by the statement of facts with which I have felt it my duty to trouble this meeting, and I earnestly hope that the people of this great country, who so munificently rewarded my exertions, will recognise also the claims of Mr. Wallace, and will step forward to cheer in the decline of life a man so justly entitled to our respect and gratitude. Mr. Hill then sat down amid hearty demonstrations of applause.

APPENDIX C. (Page 239.)

THE PENNY POST.

Copy of a Treasury Minute, dated December 26, 1839.

MY LORDS read the minute of the 23rd of August, proposing to receive communications from the public with reference to the letter stamps named in the Act 2 and 3 Victoria, cap. 52, and offering certain rewards for the same.

The communications (more than 2600 in number) received in consequence of this minute have for a long time occupied the attention of their Lordships. Many of them display much ingenuity. They are highly satisfactory, as evincing the interest taken by men of science and by the public in general in the measures now in progress for the reduction of postage, and they have afforded much useful information with reference to the details of the new arrangements. Upon full deliberation, however, their Lordships do not think it will be advisable to adopt any one of the specific plans proposed, without modification and combination with other arrangements.

After the best consideration my Lords can give the subject, and with the view of awarding most fairly between the parties, my Lords have decided not to give the specific sums mentioned in their minute of 23rd of August, but have selected four communications which are the most distinguished either for originality or for completeness, and from which my Lords have derived the greatest service, and decided to award the sum of 100*l.* to each. The authors of these four communications are as follows, the names being arranged alphabetically, viz. : Messrs. Bogardus and Coffin (who have acted together), Mr. Benjamin Cheverton, Mr. Henry Cole, and Mr. Charles Whiting.

My Lords next proceed to take into consideration the several points enumerated in the Minute of the 23rd of August, and the suggestions connected therewith which occur in the communications already referred to.

Their Lordships, upon full consideration, have decided to require that, as far as practicable, the postage of letters shall be prepaid, and to effect such prepayment by means of stamps. Their Lordships are of opinion that the convenience of the public will be consulted, more especially at first, by issuing stamps of various kinds, in order that every one may select that description of stamp which is most suitable to his own peculiar circumstances; and with a view of affording an ample choice, their Lordships are pleased to direct that the following stamps be prepared:—

First, Stamped Covers.—The stamp being struck on pieces of paper of the size of half a sheet of 4to. letter paper.

Second, Stamped Envelopes.—The stamp being struck on pieces of paper of a lozenge form, of which the stationers and others may manufacture envelopes.

Third, Adhesive stamps, or stamps on small pieces of paper with a glutinous wash at the back, which may be attached to letters either before or after they are written; and

Fourth, Stamps to be struck on paper of any description which the public may send to the Stamp Office for that purpose.

The paper for the first, second, and third kinds of stamps to be peculiar in its water-mark, or some other feature, but to be supplied to Government by competition.

My Lords direct that the Commissioners of Stamps and Taxes, and the Commissioners of Excise, should receive the official directions to take the necessary steps in conjunction with this Board, and with the Postmaster-General, for the preparation of the stamps herein enumerated.

Although the necessary experiments and investigations which have been conducted under the direction of this Board are already far advanced, my Lords fear that a considerable time will be required for completing the preparation of the dies, plates, and machinery (much of which is unavoidably of a novel construction), necessary for the manufacture of the stamps; and being desirous of affording to the public with the least possible delay the full advantage of the intended

reduction in postage, their Lordships propose at once to effect such reduction.

On the use of Stamps, however, my Lords have fully decided; they will be prepared with the least possible delay, and when ready due notice will be given of their introduction.

Having, therefore, communicated with the authorities of the Post Office, my Lords are pleased to direct that on the 10th day of January next the following arrangements shall come into operation:—

The scale of weight already established for General Post letters to be extended to the London district and other local post letters.

The charge on all letters passing between one part of the United Kingdom and another, whether by the General Post or the London district or other local post, to be one penny per single rate.

Such postage to be prepaid—if not prepaid, to be charged double on delivery.

Letters between the United Kingdom and the Colonies to be charged, if conveyed by packet, and not passing through France, at the rate of one shilling per single rate; and if conveyed by private ship, at the rate of eightpence per single rate, in whatever part of the United Kingdom they may be posted or delivered.

Letters between the United Kingdom and foreign countries (those passing to or from or through France excepted) to be charged as follows:

If conveyed by packet, and posted at the port of departure, or delivered at the port of arrival within the United Kingdom, the present packet rates. If posted or delivered in any other part of the United Kingdom, twopence per single rate, in addition to the present packet rates, unless where a lower charge shall now exist, in which case such lower charge to continue.

If conveyed by private ship, eightpence per single rate, in whatever part of the United Kingdom they may be posted or delivered.

With regard to Foreign letters to and from France, or passing through France, my Lords consider that pending such modifications as may be introduced into the treaty with that

country, the maximum of the charge for packet and inland postage should not exceed that rate which is now chargeable on a letter to and from London; no alteration being made in cases where the charge, under the present treaty, shall be less than such beforementioned rate.

The preceding reductions do not apply to letters passing *viâ* France between the United Kingdom and the Mediterranean, Egypt, and the East Indies, which will continue to be charged as at present.

Letters between the United Kingdom and foreign countries will continue to be subject to the same regulations with regard to prepayment as at present.

Lord Melbourne states to the Board her Majesty's desire that such measures may be taken with reference to her Majesty's privilege of franking, as my Lords may consider advisable for the public service, and in conformity with the other regulations which they may lay down with regard to franks.

My Lords are pleased to direct, that from and after the 10th of January next, the privilege of franking, both parliamentary and official, cease.

The printed votes and proceedings of the Imperial Parliament, or of the Colonial Legislatures of either of her Majesty's colonies, if sent in the manner now required by law, to be charged as follows, whether passing from one part of the United Kingdom to another, or between the United Kingdom and the Colonies, provided they do not pass through France, or to the East Indies, *viâ* Falmouth,—

Not exceeding two oz. in weight, one penny.

Exceeding two oz., and not exceeding four oz., two-pence.

And so on, an additional penny for every additional two ounces, without limitation as to weight; such charge to be the same whether prepaid or not.

Their Lordships, however, consider it will be proper that the Postmaster-General should be authorised, in cases where it may appear necessary so to act, to postpone the despatch of parliamentary proceedings for twenty-four hours—their Lordships being aware that the greatest inconvenience frequently has arisen from the very large influx of heavy

parliamentary papers. And their Lordships are therefore pleased to call the Postmaster-General's attention to this point with the view of his making such regulations as may be required.

The privileges now attached to addresses to her Majesty—to parliamentary petitions—to newspapers, and to the letters of soldiers and sailors engaged in service abroad, to remain unaltered, except that a soldier's or sailor's single letter will be interpreted to mean a letter not exceeding half an ounce in weight.

If any privileged letter or other article become liable to the full letter rates of postage, such rates to be charged according to the scale of rates herein established for letters. The treble duty to which newspapers in certain cases become liable to be calculated according to the same scale.

All privileges except those already enumerated to cease.

The following are exceptions to the regulation which restricts the amount of weight to sixteen oz.

1. Parliamentary proceedings as already named.
2. Addresses to her Majesty, and parliamentary petitions.
3. Letters and packets received from or addressed to places beyond the limits of the United Kingdom.
4. Letters and packets addressed to or despatched by the Government Departments, or such officer as may now have the privilege of franking by virtue of his office. And
5. Deeds, if transmitted under such regulations as the Postmaster-General may consider necessary to prevent abuse of the privilege.

In consideration of the reduction now made in the postage of ship letters, and the probable increase of such letters, the master's gratuities will be reduced to 2s. 6d. per 100 for all letters, newspapers, and other packets conveyed between one part of the United Kingdom and another. At the same time gratuities of one penny per letter or packet, and one half-penny per newspaper, will be given to the masters of ships trading to the East Indies, on the same conditions as those now applying to other ship letters and papers.

With reference to the arrangements herein made, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are to be considered as parts of the United Kingdom, and the Ionian Isles and Honduras as British colonies.

My Lords are of opinion that the whole of these arrangements should apply to all letters and packets posted within the United Kingdom, or (if brought from abroad) first delivered up to any Post-office within the United Kingdom on or after the 10th of January next.

My Lords will communicate with the public departments with regard to the mode of charging the letters of such departments.

Transmit a copy of this Minute officially to the Postmaster-General, and desire his Lordship will give the necessary instructions to his officers to carry the directions of my Lords into effect.

Desire also that he will direct the Solicitor of the Post-office to prepare a draft of a warrant in conformity with the provisions of the Postage Acts, to be signed by my Lords, and inserted in the *Gazette* pursuant to the provisions of the Act 2nd and 3rd Vic., cap. 52.

My Lords, in carrying the reduced rates of postage into operation, feel it their paramount duty to provide against any disarrangement which a great influx of letters posted at the last moment might occasion in the business of the Post Office.

Whilst their Lordships are most unwilling that there should be any positive curtailment of the time allowed to the public in posting letters, their Lordships feel it necessary, in the first instance at least, to hold out an inducement to the public not to delay the posting of letters to a late period, by restricting the benefit of the full reduction to those letters which shall be posted early. And their Lordships with this view are pleased to authorise the Postmaster-General to close the letter boxes throughout London at five o'clock, and in the country an hour or half an hour earlier than at present, according to the circumstances of each place.

My Lords direct that the fees for late letters be charged as follows:—

From the future hour of closing each box until the present hour, one penny per letter or packet, without regard to its weight; and after the present hour of closing each box, twopence per letter or packet, except where a larger fee is now established, in which case the present fee will continue.

Instruct the Postmaster-General to make arrangements for carrying to the general revenue the fees for late letters, at the same time submitting for the consideration of this Board any cases for compensation which he may consider necessary.

APPENDIX D. (Page 256.)

EXTRACT FROM FIRST REPORT OF COMMISSIONERS OF INLAND REVENUE, ON THE INLAND REVENUE.

Under the head "DISCOUNT AT THE OFFICES OF DISTRIBUTORS IN THE COUNTRY."

"It is only just to our stamping department, and more especially to Mr. Edwin Hill, under whose supervision it is placed, that we should mention the constant improvements which are every day being introduced in the machinery for impressing or manufacturing stamps, although it is impossible to enumerate or explain them in detail.

■ ■ "The most remarkable of Mr. Hill's inventions was one which has now become of comparatively minor importance, namely, the application of steam power to newspaper stamping. By a very ingenious contrivance, the unwieldy sheets of paper for newspapers, which used to be presented for stamping in immense quantities at a time, were separated, turned over, and stamped, with a dispatch and accuracy which had previously been considered as unattainable; and the superior execution of the work, instead of increasing the expense, was attended with a saving of at least 2000*l.* a year."

EXTRACT FROM SECOND REPORT OF COMMISSIONERS OF
INLAND REVENUE, ON THE INLAND REVENUE.

(Dated 12th of May, 1858.)

Under the head "STAMP DUTIES."

"The efficiency of our stamping department continues to be maintained, and to keep pace with the demands of the public, through the watchfulness and inventive ingenuity of Mr. Edwin Hill. His most recent addition to our machinery, a contrivance for fixing the blue paper and metal guard on parchment, is a substitute for two operations in different departments, and the labour of three men. This small improvement effects a saving of 300*l.* a year."

EXTRACT FROM THIRD REPORT OF COMMISSIONERS OF
INLAND REVENUE, ON THE INLAND REVENUE.

(Dated May, 1859.)

Under the head "STAMPS."

* * * "The pressure on our stamping department was at first very great, and the administrative and mechanical resources of Mr. Edwin Hill were taxed to the utmost to keep pace with the demands of the public. By the invention of new and more rapidly performing machines, and the employment of a large number of extra hands, he was able to dispose of the immense stock of cheques thus suddenly poured in, without giving rise to any complaint of delay or inconvenience."

APPENDIX E. (Page 290.)

LETTER TO THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER,
SUGGESTING TRANSFERENCE OF COLONEL
MABERLY TO ANOTHER POST.

Downing Street, June 23, 1841.

DEAR SIR,

I have to apologise for troubling you at such a time with considerations which may appear personal. Nothing but the conviction that they are not really so, and further, that they do not admit of delay, can justify the present application.

It has occurred to me as possible that the official changes now in progress may afford an opportunity of placing me (without injury to any one) in a position more favourable to the success of the measure in which I am engaged.

I think you will agree that to complete the introduction of my plan requires a careful consideration of numerous measures of detail and a close and constant watchfulness over their working. Also that its financial success depends on a rigid and searching economy in every branch of management.

I am sure you will do me the justice to admit that I have patiently and anxiously sought to accomplish these objects under the existing arrangements, and yet a review of the last twelve months, that is to say, of the period since we entered on the details of the measure, shows, I fear, that little of this kind has been effected.

If progress is thus slow while I enjoy your powerful support (and for the kindness and constancy with which it has been afforded I shall always feel most grateful), what will be the result if, unfortunately, that support should be even temporarily withdrawn?

Will you therefore excuse the liberty I take in respectfully suggesting for your consideration whether it is not highly important to the success of the measure that I should henceforward take a position in the Post-office, and whether

the official changes now in progress may not afford opportunity for creating the necessary vacancy without any injury to Colonel Maberly? Such a change could not, I presume, be otherwise than agreeable to him; it would relieve him from the unpleasant task of working out a measure which he dislikes, and which he has repeatedly affirmed cannot succeed; a measure, therefore, whose success cannot add to his reputation, and whose failure is not unlikely to be attributed, however undeservedly, to his mode of conducting it.

At the same time the proposed change would put an end to a divided, unacknowledged, and therefore ineffectual responsibility, without, I should hope, depriving me of the great advantage I have hitherto enjoyed of submitting every important question to your judgment.

Permit me to add, that as I have no desire to advance my own emoluments, the suggested change would effect a saving to the revenue of Colonel Maberly's present salary and allowances.

May I be allowed to hope that, whatever may be your decision on the arrangement I have ventured to suggest, you will excuse the liberty I have taken, and attribute my conduct to the motive by which alone I am influenced, viz., an earnest and anxious desire to establish speedily and beyond all question the success of a measure on which not only my whole reputation is at stake, but which, in case of failure, or even of partial success, is sure to be used as a ground of attack against the Government by which it has been adopted.

Let me beg that you will not take the trouble to answer this letter till you return to town. In bringing the matter under your notice before the completion of the official arrangements referred to above, the immediate object which I have in view is accomplished.

I have, &c.,

ROWLAND HILL.

